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**Nasser,**  
portrait  
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## De Charette tours region

FRENCH Foreign Minister Hervé de Charette was due in Cairo Wednesday night for talks with President Hosni Mubarak on efforts to revive the stalled Middle East peace process. This visit will be the last leg of de Charette's tour of the region, which included stops in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Gaza and Israel. During his talks with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on Tuesday, the Associated Press reported that de Charette said that Israel should honour its pledge to withdraw from Hebron, and added that France's policy on dealing with Orient House, the PLO's headquarters in East Jerusalem, has not changed. De Charette decided at the last minute to meet with Arafat at the French Consulate, but the minister sent his aides and advisors to Orient House for other talks.

While in Israel, de Charette held talks with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister David Levy.

## Bibi gesture

IN WHAT was viewed as a friendly gesture towards Egypt, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu attended a reception given by Mohamed Bassioni, the Egyptian ambassador to Israel, on Tuesday night to commemorate the 44th anniversary of the Egyptian revolution.

Israel Radio broadcast remarks made by Netanyahu at the reception praising Egypt's role in the Middle East peace process. Former Premier Shimon Peres was among some 5,000 persons, mostly Israelis and Palestinians, who attended the reception.

## Bill blasted

JAPANESE and European Union (EU) officials said a US bill to punish foreign companies that invest in Libya and Iran could threaten global trade since extraterritorial legislation was not acceptable under international law.

The US House of Representatives approved and sent to the White House on Tuesday a bill to tighten sanctions against Iran and Libya, which Washington says are sponsors of terrorism. The bill, which had been passed by the Senate, would punish foreign firms that invest in oil and gas projects, in the two states, in future. The White House said it was studying the bill to decide whether President Clinton should sign it.

## Rowing hope

EGYPTIAN rower Ali Ibrahim has made it to the semifinals of the skiff — single oarsman — competition in the Atlanta Olympics. He entered the preliminary heats as one of 20 oarsmen on Sunday and came third in his group. The first-placed rowers in each group automatically qualified for the semi-finals.

Ibrahim came second in his group and enters today's semifinals with the other first- and second-placed rowers from the second round. If Ibrahim takes one of the top three places in his group he will be in with a chance of a medal in Saturday's finals. The 20-year-old Egyptian started rowing four years ago. (see p. 13)

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# Al-Ahram

## Peace mission

BERIALS  
DIVISION

President Hosni Mubarak is going to Washington this weekend primarily to seek an effective US commitment to reactivating the peace process. He is undertaking the mission on behalf of all Arabs. Nevine Khalil reports

Capping several weeks of intensive efforts to prepare the ground for a resumption of the stalled Middle East peace process, President Hosni Mubarak travels to the United States this weekend for crucial talks with President Bill Clinton.

The Middle East today faces a difficult crossroads, "Mubarak said in a speech marking the 44th anniversary of the Egyptian revolution. He spoke with an eye on his upcoming visit to the United States, generally acknowledged as a catalyst and the prime mover behind Arab-Israeli peace talks.

It will be the fourth meeting between Mubarak and Clinton since the American leader took office nearly four years ago.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, speaking to reporters on the eve of his departure for Washington to prepare for Mubarak's visit, left no doubt about the major aim of the president's talks with Clinton.

Citing the close relations Washington has with both Arabs and Israelis, Moussa said: "The American role is needed today more than ever before." He said that Mubarak will be speaking in his capacity not only as president of Egypt but also as chairman of the Arab summit held in Cairo last month.

Moussa said he expected differences of opinion to arise with the American side during the talks. "We are not talking about carbon copy [views]," he said, but this did not mean that agreement could not be reached. In reply to a question by *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Moussa said: "Preoccupation with the presidential elections should not obstruct the American role now. A country like the United States has to act regardless of elections. The world cannot wait, and peace cannot wait too."

In addition to the peace process, Mubarak's talks with Clinton, cabinet ministers and members of the two houses of the US Congress will cover other Middle East problems, bilateral relations, notably Egypt's economic reform programme and US cooperation in this regard as well as the Middle East and North Africa economic summit to be held in Cairo next November.

Mubarak is also expected to join US Vice-President Al Gore in presiding over a meeting of the Joint Presidential Council, an advisory body of Egyptian and American officials and business leaders working within the framework of the US-Egyptian Partnership Agreement.

The Middle East peace process had in recent months all but ground to a halt following a series of blows that included the Hamas/Ihud bombings in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, the punitive closure of the West Bank and Gaza, the Israeli onslaught on Lebanon and the Qana massacre, all of which culminated in the June election of Likud's Netanyahu, an extreme right-winger, as Israeli prime minister.

The situation was aggravated by a series of statements Netanyahu made in Israel and during a US visit reflecting an intransigent position that appeared to challenge the terms of reference for Middle East peace talks

laid down at the Madrid peace conference.

Mubarak acted quickly. He convened the Cairo Arab Summit to secure a unified Arab position, to affirm the Arabs' commitment to peace and to warn Israel of the possible consequences of any reneging on the Madrid commitments. Mubarak also had bilateral talks with various Arab leaders and rounded out his consultations with a meeting on 18 July in Cairo with Netanyahu.

Mubarak commented on his talks with Netanyahu in an interview with *The Washington Post* published on Tuesday. Mubarak said: "I told him 'Look, if you are going to look for security first, you will get nowhere and terrorism will continue'... I had the impression he understood that."

In the light of the talks with Netanyahu, Mubarak said he expected progress in the Middle East peace process by the end of this year. He also told the newspaper he had assured Netanyahu that Egypt would help him but only if he helped by taking concrete and tangible steps towards a settlement.

The president said that when he met with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat last Saturday he found him sceptical about his ability to deal with Netanyahu. Mubarak added that he was able to dispel some of Arafat's doubts but the Palestinians need to see "something tangible on the ground".

"The most important result of Netanyahu's visit was his declared commitment to the Madrid conference framework and its basic principles," Moussa said in his remarks on the eve of his Washington trip. "If this [commitment] is coupled with the political will to move forward in accordance with the agreed principles in the framework of the peace process, one can assume that there will be progress."

US officials are on record as supporting the land-for-peace formula, favouring the inclusion of East Jerusalem in final-status negotiations and acknowledging that Israeli settlements in occupied Arab territories are an obstacle to peace. Mubarak expected to capitalise on this declared American position to urge Clinton to use US influence to get Israel to go along.

Osama El-Baz, Mubarak's chief political advisor, said he did not expect an outright reversal of the Israeli position, but he noted that, during his talks in Cairo, "Netanyahu put the equation of peace and security in its right perspective and his view on this issue became very close to ours." He explained that Netanyahu "understands very well that peace leads to security, but he also said that for peace to be achieved it needs security."

This echoed Mubarak's disclosure in his revolution anniversary speech that his talks with the Israeli prime minister showed that Netanyahu "understood the necessity of dealing with the Arab side as an equal partner whose interests should be served on an equal footing with Israel's interests... and that the importance of security lies in its being ensured for all sides."



photo: Hassan Diab

IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE  
the Suez Canal Company shall be nationalised". The historic words were uttered in Manshiya Square in Alexandria 40 years ago.

Few other events in the 44 years since the July Revolution have so

fired the imagination of the nation, or filled it with a similar sense of national pride. And few events have had such far-reaching consequences.

The nationalisation of the Suez Canal sounded the death-knell of the British empire, indeed of the old colonial system as a whole. In the photo above, Nasser, having delivered his history-making speech, is thronged by crowds as he rides the presidential train back to Cairo.

(see special 4-page supplement, centrefold)

## PNA cautiously optimistic

Palestinians reacted cautiously to the first high-level Palestinian-Israeli contact under Netanyahu. Most feel it's too early to judge, writes Tarek Hassan from Gaza

As Palestinian President Yasser Arafat met with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy in Gaza this Tuesday, the relief of the 10,000 Palestinian workers allowed into Israel after receiving work permits was offset by the disillusionment of around 50,000 others who are still waiting in a state of limbo.

Many Palestinian politicians did not lend much weight to the first high-level exchange since right-winger Binyamin Netanyahu won the 29 May Israeli elections. For them, it is too soon to judge whether Netanyahu's government has taken the first step towards improving relations with the Palestinians and fulfilling their national aspirations.

In the words of Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Nabil Shaath, "The measures concerning the Palestinian workers are limited so far. They are in line with the Likud ideology. They are not a breakthrough in the negotiation process between the Palestinians and Israel. Unlike Labour, Likud is not in favour of separating the Palestinian territories from Israel."

Said Al-Mudalal, the Palestinian National Authority's official responsible for labour affairs, that "Israel issues permits to married Palestinians over 30. Around 30,000 workers fulfil these conditions, while the chances are limited for the other Palestinian workers who under present circumstances cannot find work in the West Bank and Gaza."

Palestinian decision-makers are in agreement that Likud is exploiting the workers' card to cover the lack of progress on the political front.

Al-Tayeb Abdel-Rahim, secretary-general of the Palestinian Presidency, believes that Israel is continuing to obstruct the growth of an independent Palestinian economy, thus adversely affecting Palestinian trade relations with other countries.

Although the Arafat-Levy meeting, which took place amid tight Palestinian security, did not produce any concrete results, some Palestinians expressed their satisfaction that a meeting of this nature had taken place. Netanyahu's hardline Likud Party had for years denounced Arafat

as a murderer and denounced those holding talks with him, including former Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

In a press conference following the meeting, Arafat told reporters: "We decided to formalise our relations and to create the proper frameworks for examining the issues and advancing them... We have agreed that these contacts will continue at all levels." A PLO official remarked on the "immediate chemistry" between Arafat and Levy.

Abdel-Rahim said that the meeting indicated "Israel's recognition of the PNA and that the right-wing Israeli government has no alternative but to recognise and negotiate with the Authority".

Reuters quoted Israel's leading peace movement, Peace Now, as saying that the meeting was "an important step for peace and security — a step that erased ten years of Likud Party disregard for the Palestinian people, its representatives and legitimate rights."

PNA Local Government Minister Saeb Erekat, who accompanied Arafat, was quoted by news agencies as saying that "the meeting was a serious attempt to put the peace process back on track." Erekat said progress had been made on a number of issues, among them a long-delayed Israeli troop withdrawal from a part of the West Bank town of Hebron, freeing a Palestinian woman prisoner, and the imminent resumption of talks of a crucial overall Israeli-PLO steering committee that last met five months ago.

While certain Palestinian elements regard the Arafat-Levy contact as an exploratory meeting that will pave the way for further talks, Nabil Abu Redinah, Arafat's political advisor, cautioned against undue optimism. "We would like this meeting to be followed by a Arafat-Netanyahu meeting," he said.

Palestinian sources revealed that Arafat had urged the Israeli government to fulfil its promises during Tuesday's 90-minute exchange. Chief among these are commencing work on a safe passage to allow Palestinians in and out of the West Bank and Gaza, releasing Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons and further easing the closures in the self-rule areas. It is re-

ported that Arafat also expressed his hope that Israel would carry out the remaining elements of the autonomy agreement, including partial withdrawal from Hebron and the resumption of final status talks.

The Israelis, on the other hand, took care to remind Arafat that, having been in power for only a month and a half, the new government was still studying the situation regarding relations with the PNA. The government believes that it has inherited a security problem from the former Labour-led government, and must first find a solution to this problem. If such a problem had not already existed, questioned one Israeli official, why did Peres's government halt its redeployment process in Hebron?

Press reports noted that the issue of Jerusalem was conspicuously absent in the Arafat-Levy meeting. PLO officials were quoted by agencies as saying that Levy had refrained from direct references to PLO activities in the city, and Arafat avoided calling for an end to Jewish settlements in the area.

All in all, the Arafat-Levy meeting came too early to inspire much confidence in Netanyahu's government among Palestinians. The overriding Palestinian sentiment at the moment is that the outstanding issues will be cautiously and slowly addressed by Netanyahu's government.

Agencies reported that Levy asked Arafat to take a message to Syria saying he is ready to hold top-level talks, in the first overture of this nature to Syria by the new right-wing government. According to an Israeli official quoted in the *Jerusalem Post*, Levy told Arafat: "Tell the Syrian foreign minister that his country's conduct up till now has not advanced peace... So perhaps the [Syrians] should do something and go for open dialogue. I am willing to meet him anywhere and anytime."

Arafat is due to travel to Syria today for the first time in three years for talks with President Hafez Al-Assad in an attempt to heal the rift caused by the 1993 PLO-Israeli Oslo agreement. Earlier contact had been made between Arafat and Assad at the Cairo Arab Summit last month.

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# Battle at the Bar

The Bar Association continues to face problems with judicial sequestration as one of its custodians decides to resign following alleged transgressions by his counterparts. Amira Howdydly investigates

Prominent Islamist lawyer Mohamed Selim El-Awwa, one of the three custodians responsible for administering judicial sequestration at the Bar Association, dropped a bombshell last week when he asked to resign from his custodial duties. Acceptance of his resignation is conditional on the court's acceptance of his lawsuit alleging malpractice on the part of the other two custodians as his reason for wishing to relinquish his post.

El-Awwa's action comes in the wake of a series of lawsuits and counter lawsuits filed by representatives of the association's strong opposing groups of leftists and Islamists, who are bidding for control of the association.

In his plea to the court, El-Awwa accused the other two custodians, Ahmed El-Khawaga, the association's chairman for the past 30 years and Mohamed El-Mahdi, chairman of the syndicate's Giza branch, of "violating the court's ruling of judicial sequestration on the main syndicate by extending their authority to the branch syndicates", and of signing blank sheets of paper for the lawyers who want to be appointed custodians at the branch syndicates, thus giving them carte blanche to run the branches as they please. The case will be heard on 11 August.

The Bar Association — dominated for the past four years by the Muslim Brotherhood — was put under judicial sequestration last April by the Arab Court of First Instance in response to a lawsuit filed by 14 lawyers who alleged financial irregularities by the association's Islamist-controlled council. The court cited a report by the Central Auditing Agency showing that large sums of Bar Association money had been misappropriated and that the association's own auditing body had not applied relevant financial regulations. No record had been kept of money allocated to pilgrimages, and the syndicate's final budgets for the years 1989 to 1995 had not been submitted to the agency.

According to El-Awwa, the court's verdict "forced judicial sequestration on the main syndicate only and did not mention the branch syndicates at all". However, he claims that El-Khawaga and El-Mahdi "managed to wrest a ministerial decree from the minister of justice's assistant forcing judicial sequestration on the branch syndicates". Such a move, he added, was illegal "because the ministry is an administrative, rather than judicial authority, and therefore cannot issue such decisions".

Meanwhile, representatives of the local Cairo, Alexandria and Al-Arish chapters of the association have filed lawsuits contesting the sequestration.

Despite being a custodian for the past three months, El-Awwa said that he only discovered the "illegal violations" last week, when he saw El-Khawaga sign a blank sheet of paper and give it to some lawyers. El-Awwa maintains that the actions of El-Khawaga and El-Mahdi are aimed at increasing the influence of anti-Islamists like themselves within the syndicate.

The 1992 Bar Association elections, which resulted in an overwhelming victory for the Muslim Brotherhood, who won nine out of the council's 24 seats, caused widespread controversy within the association, known as the "caste of freedom".

Since then, accusations and counter accusations have dominated most of the association's activities, especially with the Islamists are concerned. It was said that the court's decision to appoint El-Awwa as a custodian was made with the aim of placing the Islamist faction. Nevertheless, a week later the decision was contested by dozens of Islamist lawyers, temporarily suspending its implementation.

El-Khawaga has denied all of El-Awwa's allegations, describing them as "pure misunderstandings". He told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "I did not wrest a ministerial decree to put the branch syndicates under sequestration. In fact, it was the lawyers who had called for the sequestration who resorted to the Ministry of Justice to send a bailiff to implement sequestration on the branch syndicates. I had nothing to do with it." As for the blank sheets, El-Khawaga said that he had merely been "too busy" and, therefore, was saving time by signing blank sheets before anything had been written on them.

El-Khawaga argued that El-Awwa was aware of all the actions taken by the custodians "as he himself signed 90 per cent of the papers and cheques".

El-Awwa, however, insists that he, and the Bar Association's 186,000 lawyers, were "deceived". According to Article 144 of the Bar Association code, said El-Awwa, the syndicate chapters are totally independent of the main syndicate and are not affiliated to it administratively. "Therefore forcing sequestration on the branch syndicates is illegal and so is El-Khawaga's decision to freeze all their bank assets."

As the legal battle continues, observers believe that El-Awwa's stand will inevitably strengthen the Islamist trend in the syndicate. El-Awwa, on the other hand, maintains that he had "no such thing in mind" when he decided to resign. Rather it was the other camp which was "manoeuvring" to increase its influence and win more support for anti-Islamists in the Bar Association elections, scheduled for 30 September.



PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak delivered a speech on the occasion of the 44th anniversary of the 23rd of July Revolution. In his speech, Mubarak said "the great Egyptian Revolution" had changed the face of life in Egypt and the Arab World, and led to radical changes in the history of the region. He stressed that our vocation as Arabs is to strengthen our unity to gain just and comprehensive peace in the region.

# Government ban on FGM

The Ministry of Health issued a decree banning the practice of female genital mutilation in and out of all hospitals. Dina Ezzat reports

Last week, Sara, an 11-year-old girl, bled to death in a Cairo hospital after a botched female genital mutilation (FGM) operation was performed on her by a village barber.

Police are investigating the incident and the barber is likely to face criminal charges for inflicting physical harm on the girl.

A few days later, the Minister of Health and Family Planning, Dr Ismail Sallam, issued a decree banning FGM in all hospitals. The decree also specified that midwives, doctors and nurses registered with the Ministry of Health must stop the ritual or face criminal charges.

Sallam stated that the decision puts an end to the psychological and physical harm that young girls are forced to endure as a result of the ritual.

A common belief in Egyptian society is that FGM checks a woman's sexuality and thus prevents pre-marital sex and promiscuity.

Although many Muslim and Christian clergymen would say that neither religion condones the ritual, others believe it is obligatory and encourage thousands of families to subject their girls to the practice.

The late Grand Imam Gad El-Haq Ali Gad El-Haq — who passed away earlier this year — publicly supported the practice and suggested that Muslims rejecting it should be punished.

To counter this trend, Sallam requested the cooperation of clergymen, including the current Grand Imam of Al-Azhar mosque, Sayed Tam-

tawi. Tamawi had declared that there is no definite evidence that the practice is ordained by Islam.

"The decree has been enforced from the day it was made public," said Dr Muslma El-Shafei, director of the Reproductive Health Department at the Ministry of Health and Family Planning.

"We are not going to compromise. This operation has serious consequences and we are not going to allow members of the medical profession to practise it," she added.

According to El-Shafei, ministry officials will make sure that the law is properly enforced. She explained, "they are going to visit the different hospitals and clinics to make sure that no doctors are violating the ministerial decree."

El-Shafei denied that the decision was solely prompted by Sara's death and affirmed that it is based on an elaborate study which examined medical, religious and sociological perspectives.

According to a recent report from the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights, FGM — which usually involves clipping the clitoris, but on rare occasions can include the removal of all the outer sexual organs — is performed daily on about 3,600 girls between the ages of eight and 14.

Some of these girls meet the same sad fate as Sara. In February of last year, Amira, a 14-year-old school girl living in the small village of Kafir Al-Tawila in the province of Dakhliya, died af-

ter a licensed pediatrician sliced off her clitoris. Others have to live with chronic health or psychological problems.

In April, a barber in a village near Assiut in southern Egypt was sentenced to a year in prison for causing serious and permanent damage to a 9-year-old girl during a female genital mutilation operation.

The government previously tried to ban the tradition but failed.

In September 1994, former Minister of Family Planning and Welfare Dr Maher Mahran, drafted a bill to prohibit the practice, which he described as "a butchery that damages the health and lives of more than half of all young girls".

Mahran's comment was made as international attention focused on the issue following a Cable News Network (CNN) investigative report which showed a nine-year-old girl fighting the cutting tools of a barber in one of Cairo's poorer neighbourhoods. The report was broadcast during the 1994 UN International Conference on Population and Family Planning in Cairo.

However, Mahran's bill never left his desk.

And in November of the same year, former Minister of Health Dr Ali Abdel-Fattah, broke a 50-year-long ban by re-introducing the ritual to the ministry's public hospitals and clinics. Abdel-Fattah's rationale was that banning the operation in hospitals encouraged families to take their daughters to barbers and untrained nurses, thus

increasing the health hazards of the operation.

But non-governmental organisations (NGOs) rejected the move as "a promotion of the harmful ritual". The Female Genital Mutilation Combat Task Force sought the assistance of both local and international organisations, ultimately persuading Abdel-Fattah to abrogate his decree in January of this year.

But this did not stop business from going on as usual.

Women's rights activists are concerned that while the recent ministerial decree officially and publicly denounces the practice, they believe that since it does not carry the weight of a law, it still leaves room for FGM to thrive undetected.

Many believe that a law against FGM is still a remote and elusive possibility. According to Amina El-Guindi, secretary-general of the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood, attempts to incorporate an article banning the practice in the recently passed comprehensive child code were aborted because most parliamentarians disapproved of the move.

Awareness remains the key factor in the fight against the ritual. The FGM Combat Task Force is focusing on enhancing health and religious awareness to stop parents from forcing their girls to be mutilated. But as members of the NGO admit, it will be years before the country sees the last case of FGM.

# Arab front to fight normalisation

Three pan-Arab professional unions are calling for a wide Arab front to stop all forms of normalisation of ties with Israel. Rana Allam reports

Arab activists are planning to set up a group to oppose normalisation between the Arab world and Israel. Inspired by June's Arab summit, Farouq Abu Eissa, secretary-general of the Arab Lawyers' Union, issued a call to all Arab civil institutions and unions. Regional and international developments, he said, had made it necessary for Arab non-governmental bodies to unite to deal with the challenges and dangers they face.

Of these, the growth of foreign intervention in the region and the Israeli-American strategic alliance were the most serious, he said. In view of the declining status of the Arab world and its lack of unity, it was necessary to move quickly to take advantage of the reconciliatory atmosphere preceding the summit.

It was made clear during the summit that Arab states would reconsider the steps that had been taken towards normalisation if Israel reneged on its commitments.

The Arab Lawyers' Union is joined by the Arab Artists Union and the Arab Journalists' Union in their call for an anti-normalisation movement. "In conjunction with last June's summit, we are preparing to hold a conference next November in Cairo," confirmed Saadeddin Wahba, chairman of the Arab Artists' Union and a prominent writer. The anti-normalisation front, he added, would back up the summit's decision.

As Artists' Union chairman, Wahba had earlier issued a decision banning the normalisation of relations with Israel in the field of the arts. He was backed by 13 Arab states. In his view, Israel has merely been "fooling around with peace", and matters are now deteriorating.

Sahabeddin Hafez, secretary-general of the Arab Journalists' Union and a senior political analyst, said that closer Arab relations with Israel were "harmful to Arab interests". Even if governments were obliged to enter negotiations and sign official agreements with Israel, this should not be a signal for the peoples of those countries to rush into normalisation, he added.

Egypt was the first Arab country to sign a peace treaty with Israel, in 1979. But relations have never really thawed to anything more than a "cold peace". Five years after the Camp David treaty was signed, former Israeli Prime Min-

ister Yitzhak Shamir said that Israel had paid a high price for peace and was "waiting for the Egyptian people to give us real peace". Provisions for normalisation, considered by the Israelis as one of the most important aspects of the peace treaty, were never really applied. In 1989, Shamir remarked that "peace and normalisation stay on paper, and the Israeli Embassy [in Egypt] remains isolated."

According to Mohamed Fayed, secretary-general of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights, the election of Benjamin Netanyahu has left Israel with a government even keener to achieve normalisation without making any real concessions towards peace.

Those concerned with establishing the anti-normalisation front believe that it is now vital to form an Arab public opinion that opposes normalisation without the full return of Arab rights.

Wahba believes that institutions of civil society are well-placed to fulfil this role. "These non-governmental organisations and unions are more aware of the political line that the Arab people should follow," said Wahba. "These people can take action and put obstacles in the road to normalisation," agreed Helmi Shashawy, director of the Cairo-based Arab Research Centre and a member of the Popular Anti-Zionist Movement. Public opinion, he added, had been raised over far more minor issues. "Now it is time to take action against normalisation with the Zionist enemy. A more patriotic cause."

According to Hafez, the conference will voice opposition to normalisation pacts made on an official level between Israel and Arab governments under the sponsorship of the United States. For 17 years, Hafez said, the Egyptian people have faced consecutive waves of brainwashing and publicity for Israel. But, of the Arab nations, Egypt had done the least to achieve normalisation with the Israelis, "because they [Egyptians] realised instinctively that their interests clash".

After four wars with Israel, followed by the Camp David Peace Treaty, the war for normalisation began, opposed by most Egyptians, continued Hafez. Egypt's attitude, he maintained, has encouraged other Arab nations to resist closer ties with Israel, but at this stage, "an organised Arab movement is a necessity to lead the way against normalisation."

# Prisoners in the Egyptian-Israeli package

Egyptian officials have initiated efforts to pinpoint exactly the number of Egyptian citizens imprisoned in Israel, reports Dina Ezzat. But, there is more to the issue than meets the eye

Officials at the Egyptian Consulate in Israel have begun taking steps to update their information on the number of Egyptians in Israeli jails, and the charges for which they were incarcerated.

While the Israeli Embassy in Cairo pegs the number of Egyptian prisoners in Israel at about 25, this figure is yet to be verified. Ahmed Kamal, the Egyptian consul to Israel, said that "We suspect there are a few dozen, without an entry visa, one must be procured should they opt to go elsewhere in the country. Failure to do so results in arrest."

Drug trafficking and subversion are also among charges that have been levelled against some Egyptians who wind up in Israeli jails. Those convicted of the latter crime are the minority, said Kamal, but are also the ones serving the longest prison terms.

"Among those who have been serving lengthy terms behind bars in Israel is Mohamed Soleiman Sawada, who was charged with anti-Israeli activities and given a life sentence," he added.

A major impediment to Egyptian government efforts to keep track of citizens travelling to Israel, said Kamal, "is that Egyptians who go to do not follow the proper procedure of registering with us [the Egyptian Consulate]. So, we never really know how many Egyptians are in Israel."

Egyptian sources estimate that there are about 3,000 Egyptian workers in Israel and no more than 20,000 who visit the country each year.

Whatever the figure, the number of Egyptians incarcerated in Israeli jails seems to be on the upswing, mainly, said Kamal, as a result of an influx of Egyptian workers heading to Israel in search of job opportunities.

"Most of the prisoners are workers who entered Israel on a tourist visa and then decided to stay on and work. But when the Israeli Ministry of Labour sends inspectors to ferret

out illegal foreign labourers, they are arrested," explained Kamal.

The increase is also due to Egyptians who enter Israel without the necessary visa. While Egyptians are permitted to enter Israel without an entry visa, one must be procured should they opt to go elsewhere in the country. Failure to do so results in arrest.

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"Among those who have been serving

lengthy terms behind bars in Israel is Mohamed Soleiman Sawada, who was charged with anti-Israeli activities and given a life sentence," he added.

A major impediment to Egyptian government

efforts to keep track of citizens travelling to Israel, said Kamal, "is that Egyptians who go to do not follow the proper procedure of registering with us [the Egyptian Consulate]. So, we never really know how many Egyptians are in Israel."

Egyptian sources estimate that there are about 3,000 Egyptian workers in Israel and no more than 20,000 who visit the country each year.

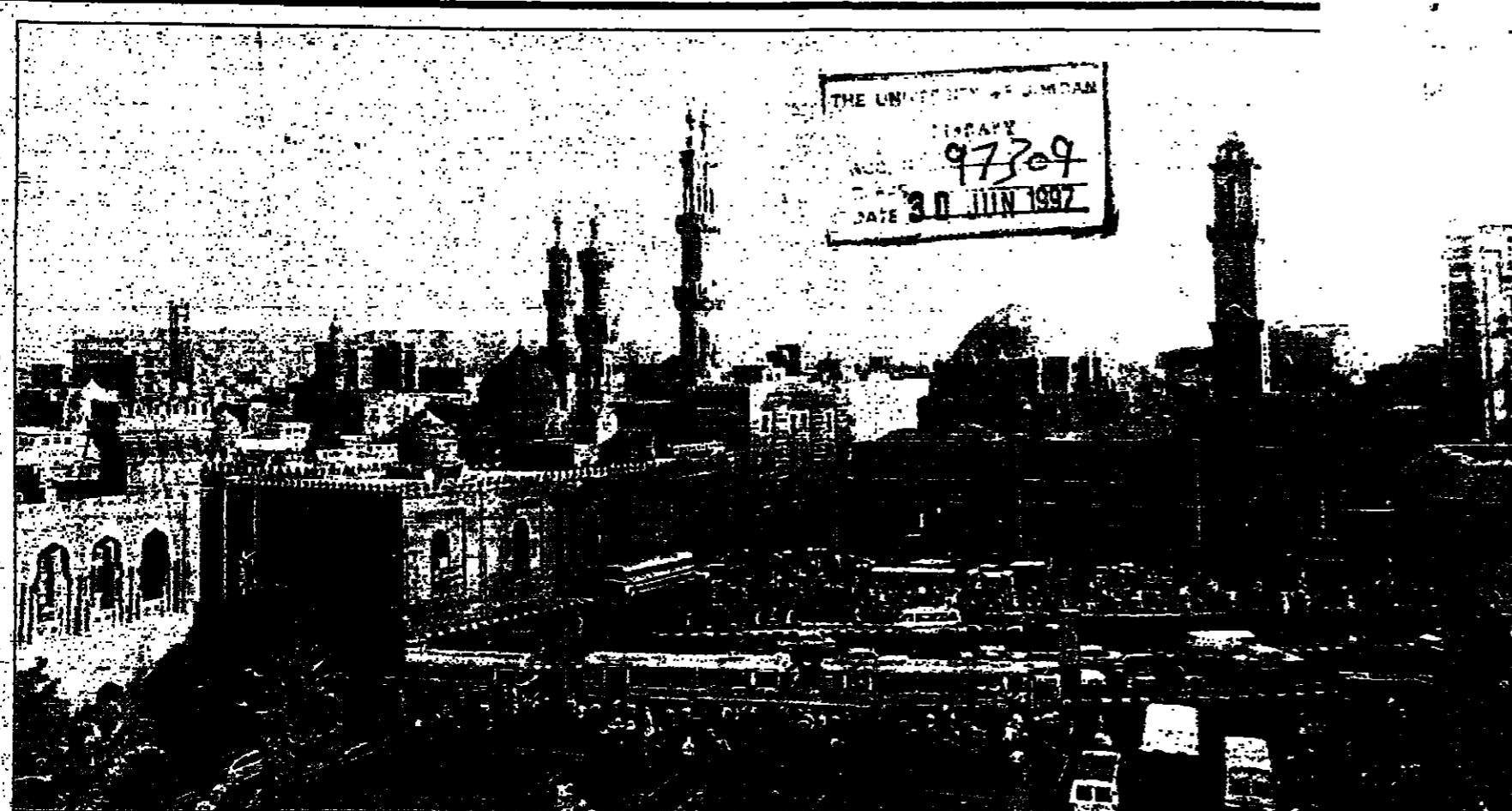
Whatever the figure, the number of Egyptians incarcerated in Israeli jails seems to be on the upswing, mainly, said Kamal, as a result of an influx of Egyptian workers heading to Israel in search of job opportunities.

"Most of the prisoners are workers who entered Israel on a tourist visa and then decided to stay on and work. But when the Israeli Ministry of Labour sends inspectors to ferret

out illegal foreign labourers, they are arrested," explained Kamal.

The increase is also due to Egyptians who enter Israel without the necessary visa. While Egyptians are permitted to enter Israel without an entry visa, one must be procured should they opt to go elsewhere in the country. Failure to do so results in arrest.

Drug trafficking and subversion are also among charges that have been levelled against some Egyptians who wind up in Israeli jails. Those convicted of the latter crime are the minority, said Kamal, but are also the ones serving the longest prison terms.



Fatimid landmark to regain old splendour

photo: Mohamed El-Qiq

## Al-Azhar restoration launched

Major restoration is planned for Al-Azhar Mosque, the world's oldest centre for Islamic theology. Nevine El-Aref reports

Al-Azhar is a landmark of Fatimid Cairo. Built as the state's official mosque, it is also the world's oldest and most prestigious institute of Islamic studies, drawing thousands of religious scholars from all over the Islamic world. However, humidity, drainage water, natural erosion and human use have taken their toll on the foundations, walls and columns of the city's famous mosque.

A ministerial decree ordered an urban planning study and restoration blueprints were drawn up for both Al-Azhar Mosque and the area surrounding it in 1992, according to Fawzi El-Zeffar, administrative director of Al-Azhar. However, action on the plans was delayed until this year, when Mohammed Sayed Tamawi became grand sheikh of Al-Azhar.

When he took over the post, Tamawi invited the higher committee of the restoration project, consisting of the ministers of awqaf (Islamic endowments), culture, housing and infrastructure, the governor of Cairo and the secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) to a meeting to discuss lack of progress on the project. It was decided to change contractors and the new private company to which the project was assigned

began work immediately.

According to El-Zeffar, the restoration scheme encompasses every part of the building, including the foundations, walls, domes, minarets, lighting system and toilets.

Egypt is financing the project jointly with three Islamic countries. Saudi Arabia is donating LE10 million, Pakistan \$100,000, and Brunel is giving over LE4 million.

These funds will contribute not only to the mosque restoration project but also to providing new housing and facilities for students of the institute.

The Al-Azhar restoration is only part of a wider scheme to restore Fatimid Cairo. According to Adel El-Zoghbi, project supervisor of the body which is to tackle the larger-scale scheme, particular attention will be paid to the area surrounding Al-Azhar. At present, El-Zoghbi said, there was a lot of rubbish in the area, largely as a result of the fruit and vegetable sellers who set up stalls around the mosque. This, in El-Zoghbi's view, represents a "total disregard of the dignity and the holiness of the place".

To preserve the historic character of the area, all workshops, shops and houses adjoining the mosque will be removed, while

houses, shops, and other buildings facing the mosque will be renovated in such a way as to blend in with the architectural and historic character of the mosque. Al-Azhar's administrative offices will also be moved to the Khaleeli garden located at the end of Al-Azhar Street just in front of the Dar Al-Efta building.

Al-Azhar Street itself is to be pedestrianised, with two parking areas at each end of the street. Improvements are also planned to the area's infrastructure.

Abdel-Halim Nouridin, secretary-general of the SCA, said that his body was responsible only for the technical supervision of the architectural work and the fine restoration work within the mosque. The SCA is also providing a new lighting system for the minarets and facades of the mosque, which will aim to dramatise the monument's historic and religious significance.

Al-Azhar Mosque was the second mosque to be built in Egypt, after Amr ibn Al-As Mosque. It was repaired, renovated and enlarged at various stages in its history.

The first addition was by Caliph Al-Hafiz Idris Allah Al-Fatimi, who added a fourth roway (hostel for visiting pilgrims). The

mosque continued to be the focus of state attention as long as the Fatimids were in power, but it was neglected under the rule of the Ayyubids, who even discontinued the practice of the caliph holding Friday prayers.

During the Mameluke era, however, the mosque regained its leading role. Sultan Qait Bay redesigned its main gate and added a minaret. Sultan Barqoq introduced further improvements and Sultan El-Ghouri added a splendid twin-towered minaret. The Mamelukes also established two schools attached to the mosque. Emir Abd-el-Rahman Kattabah undertook a major architectural overhaul, adding another roway.

Modern renovation and expansion has included Roway El-Maghbarah, added by Mohamed Ali, and El-Sayed gate, renovated by Khedive Ismail. In addition Khedive Tawfiq renewed the mosque's open courtyard and Roway El-Sayed. Khedive Abbas Helmi established the Roway Al-Abbas and restored the mosque's western facade and its Mizanin gates.

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

## The right to be elected

**Awad El-Morr**, chief justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court, in the second article of his series dealing with the Court as a guarantor of human rights, examines the Court's ruling against laws that compromised the right of citizens to stand freely in elections



Under Article 62 of the Constitution the rights of all citizens to vote, to be elected and to express their opinions in public referendums with a view to enabling them to take part in the conduct of public affairs through their freely chosen representatives are guaranteed.

It is the People's Assembly which, under the Constitution, is exclusively vested with the power to legislate in all domains. The Shura Council's competence is purely consultative, as demonstrated by Articles 194 and 195 of the Constitution.

Case no. 23, for the eighth judicial year, decided on the 15 April, 1989 was referred by the Court of Merits to the Supreme Constitutional Court, and addressed the validity of Law no. 120/1980 regarding the Shura Council.

The Court upheld the opinion that the statute was unconstitutional since it confined the right to be elected to the Shura Council to citizens affiliated with current political parties. In doing so it barred other qualified citizens from their inherent right to be freely chosen by the electorate, in violation of Article 62 of the Constitution. The insertion of this article in part three of the Constitution was viewed as conclusive evidence that the rights and duties regulated therein were intended to encompass citizens as a whole, in order to guarantee their effective participation in political life.

The exercise of the rights prescribed by Article 62 of the Constitution is a national duty, and consequently should be enacted by all citizens in what is one of the most important public spheres, namely guaranteeing the representative character of the government.

By denying the right of independent candidates to be elected, therefore, the challenged statute transcended Constitutional bounds. In addition, the statute contravened the general principle asserted by the court, according to which restrictions on political rights which are neither mandated by the very nature of the respective right, nor by the requirement of its exercise, should not be condoned.

In response to the government's argument that independent candidates had no place in a political system based on multi-parties, as prescribed by Article 5 of the Constitution, the Court pointed out that in principle the power to legislate remains discretionary unless restrained by the Constitution.

Furthermore, limitations made by the legislature should in no way render obsolete or impractical the proper exercise of fundamental Constitutional rights and freedoms.

The Court concluded that Article 5 of the Constitution was never envisaged as permitting the exclusion of independent candidates from national or local councils or assemblies. Rather, it was devised to eliminate the totalitarian political regime that had crystallised under the Arab Socialist Union without infringing on rights codified by the Constitution.

The judgement of the Court applies to barring independent candidates from any other councils or assemblies of a representative nature, including the popular councils formed in accordance with Article 162 of the Constitution, and the People's Assembly whose composition is prescribed by Article 87 thereof. In all these cases, the Court enunciated the same principles, and struck down the respective statute enacted in violation thereof.

## Chronicle

# Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

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At the end of the 19th century, Egypt had 169 newspapers and magazines, according to an official report by the British High Commission in Cairo. Strangely enough, there is no complete list of names of all the publications. But the commission's report commended the freedom of expression underlying the journalistic proliferation. In this instalment of his chronicles of Egypt's modern history, Dr Yunan Labib Rizq tells how journalists flourished in the last two decades of the 19th century despite British military occupation

In one of his yearly reports, the British high commissioner, Lord Cromer, wrote that, at the end of the 19th century, Egypt could boast 169 newspapers and magazines. This, to him, was indicative of the amount of freedom in the country two decades after the British occupation, and one of the political fruits of lifting the restrictions on journalism.

Scholars have searched diligently for the names of all these periodicals, yet what they came up with barely exceeded the findings of both hands. The discrepancy is one of the enigmas of the history of the Egyptian press.

Throughout the 1880s, the newspaper industry was virtually a monopoly of Egypt's growing Syrian community. They also had the lion's share of new publications, as numerous references in *Al-Ahram* confirm. Saiti Faris began publication of a new bi-weekly in November 1885. Georgi Ghazali launched *Al-Safa* (Clarity) in April 1887. In September 1889 Khalil Zeinah inaugurated *Al-Rawi* (The Narrator) and, a month later, Nicola Zikri began publication of *Farwah Al-Ahram* (Prins of the Spirit). In the following decade, Syrians remained in the vanguard. In 1892 Junji Zefdan launched *Al-Hilal* (The Crescent). Naguib and Amr Haddad founded *Lisan Al-Arab* (The Arab Tongue) in August 1894 and two years later Nicola Shalabi began publication of *Al-Ra'id*. *Al-Masri* (The Egyptian Pioneer).

Most strikes one as so extraordinary in this world is the astounding mixture of different types of newspapers. In addition to Arabic language newspapers, there were newspapers in French, Italian, Greek and German. The majority of the editors were of Syrian origin, but, by the end of the century, Egyptians began to edge their way into the world of journalism. The secular press, dominated by the most prominent secularist of the last century Shibli Shumali, appeared by side on the newswstands with the religious press, led by *Al-Masri*, published by Sheikh Rasid Rida. Then, there were the newspapers of the graduates of the school of law headed by Mustafa Kamel and Ahmed Lutfi El-Sayed, of the sheikhs such as Ali Yousef owner of the illustrious *Al-Ma'ayid*. There were very serious and weighty periodicals and others that lifted humour and parody to new heights. This is the exciting world into which we shall now embark.

The growth of the newspaper industry in Egypt was the product of several developments in the late 19th century. Most significant was the influx of large numbers of immigrants from Greater Syria. The first wave arrived in the wake of the civil war in Jabal Lubnan in the 1860s. A second wave, extending from 1882 to the outbreak of World War I in 1914, bringing immigrants, not just from Lebanon, but from all parts of the Ottoman's Syrian province.

The newcomers arrived playing their various trades. Among them were journalists who had founded successful newspapers in their land of origin, but, they believed, not as successful as they would be in Egypt. The following items from *Al-Ahram's* 13 March 1885 edition illustrates:

"The erudite men-of-letters Yacoub Saruf and Faris Nima, founders of the venerable *Al-Ma'ayid*, have resolved to establish themselves in Egypt and to publish their learned scientific and industrial journal, which has already achieved considerable repute among specialised and general readers."

The other news of Egyptian intellectuals

only one announcement, of a new Italian newspaper. Appearing on 5 April 1889, it said, "Alexandria welcomes the first issue of *Operario* (The Worker) which investigates many political, scientific and literary topics. We wish it every success."

Similarly, the German press receives a lone mention in April 1887 when *Al-Ahram* heralds the forthcoming publication of a new German newspaper. "We have been informed that the German language *La Germania* will be appearing soon in the capital. It will be published twice a week."

The announcement, however, was premature. The newspaper, to our knowledge, never did appear. Perhaps its prospects were doomed by the relatively small numbers of Germans in Egypt and by the relatively few numbers of Egyptians who could read German, in spite of their admiration for that country.

As one might expect from such a surge of newspapers, there evolved a climate of prolific journalistic creativity.

There were periodicals that catered to a range of specialist interests, notably in the fields of medicine, the law and economy. Medical periodicals had the lion's share of *Al-Ahram's* new publications column. In August 1887 the newspaper announced that it had received the first issue of *Al-Shifa* (Health), a magazine produced by a group of Egypt's most prominent physicians of the time.

Around this time, *Al-Ahram* also notified its readers of the recently published *Al-Shifa* (Medicine) "founded and edited by the venerable scientist, Dr. Shibli Shumali". It was not long afterwards that the newspaper heralded *Tabit Al-Aila* (Family Doctor), which it praised as "containing much of beneficial interest in the field of medicine and health".

Law periodicals ranked second, with three magazines dealing with legal and judicial affairs.

In the field of economics there was first *Al-I'an* (The Advertisement), a curious magazine that we will leave to *Al-Ahram* to describe. This new magazine, it says, "is very useful, as it contains all information concerning advertisements, commercial news, prices, agricultural affairs and the types of crops. In addition to a literary work, every issue also contains a riddle and offers a valuable prize to whoever solves it. The splendid magazine appears once a week and is distributed for free to advertisers, official agencies, port authorities, houses of commerce and to whoever requests it."

Another economic periodical was *Al-Murusalat Al-Gadida* (New Correspondence) "a magazine on commerce, industry, science and the arts", owned and operated by a Frenchman. There was also *Al-Yanabi* (The Lottery) which, according to *Al-Ahram*, was a "financial, economic, commercial and literary journal founded by David Farhi".

The owner was Jewish but was only natural given the prominent role this community played in the Egyptian economy at the time.

Perhaps, responded *Al-Ahram*, "the solution is to import that new invention in Russia — a newspaper printed on cigarette paper which can be read and then used to wrap tobacco. That way people can burn those articles they do not want to keep!"

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



## Privatising education is the solution

Faced with onerous legal and administrative hurdles, the private sector is shying away from investing in the educational system, writes **Mohamed Abdel-Fattah Ragab**

Over the past few years, the government has expended tremendous effort and injected a great deal of capital into improving and reforming the educational system, to the delight of the business community. Under the auspices of the Education Minister Hussein Kamel Bahaeeddin, an average of five new schools are opened daily. But while the expansion in the educational system is highly visible, it still falls short of the explosive student population growth rate.

At the heart of the debate over educational reform is the question: are our schools failing because we spent too little on them, or because of the way they are organised?

More resources are part of the answer, but our public schools also suffer from the over-centralisation and bureaucratic rigidity that plagues government organisations in general. And while I am in favour of privatising education, we cannot afford to leave education entirely to be shaped by consumer and market forces. We must save, not abandon, our public schools.

What is required is a change of structure and incentives that will encourage public schools to improve on the basis of their own initiative, for their own interest and from their own resources.

For example, the hiring and training of highly qualified teachers does not meet the needs dictated by the student population growth rate. If the status quo does not change, our future generations will suffer due to shortage of resources resulting from this gap between the demand for more teachers and schools and the rate at which the educational system is expanding.

The business community in Egypt is convinced of the need to participate in the development of the educational system. Private businesses have contributed by donating new school premises to the Ministry of Education.

They are understanding of the financial burden placed on the Egyptian budget after new economic policies were implemented that required a change in the laws governing the educational system.

The business community recognises that a number of impediments stand in the way of private sector involvement in education. In order to encourage the private sector to participate in education, their investments should be self-sustaining. However, Law 306, which deals with private sector education, affords the Ministry of Education the right to set school fees which, in most cases, do not cover the administrative costs of the school. In turn, such legislation affects the quality of education, and leads to the crowding of students into classes, under-qualified teachers and low quality equipment. We believe that if each school is given a free hand to set its fees, then the quality of the education will improve given the ensuing competition to provide the best services. This, in turn, will encourage and increase investment in that field.

At this point it should be noted that schools not governed by this law, including an increasing number of foreign schools operating in Egypt, which are setting their own fees based on the laws of supply and demand, are providing students with quality education.

In addition, laws and regulations governing the licensing of new universities and institutes of higher learning tend to place obstacles in the path of investments in these fields. For instance, it is not permitted for any individual or corporation to start a new university except under the umbrella of a non-profit organisation. These organisations' profits are not to exceed four per cent of the invested capital.

Furthermore, to establish institutions of higher education, non-profitable organisations must own the premises. Since buildings might cost millions of pounds such a law becomes a true impediment.

Current laws do not permit private educational institutions to form joint ventures with foreign institutions. In addition, Ministry of Education red tape can delay the licensing of new schools and educational institutions for months and, in some cases, years. The main cause of the delay seems to be that the administrative department responsible for issuing licences for such projects is entrusted with many other responsibilities. This should be the sole responsibility of a separate department.

Also, non-profit organisations are governed by Law 32 of 1964 which gives local authorities the right to dissolve the board of directors of these institutions at will. In effect, this means that the government has the right to dismiss the people who have raised the money and made the effort to start such a project.

In addition to the obstacles posed by unsympathetic laws, Egypt also faces a fundamental challenge: reversing the stark and growing disparity between the fate of college educated and non-college educated youth in our society. In the new global economy, the collective skills and capacities of a nation's workforce are its main competitive advantage.

The strategy of an apprenticeship system that combines classroom instruction with on-the-job training at local businesses should be immediately implemented.

To build this system we need to develop a combined work-based and school-based curriculum that involves spending increasing amounts of time at the work site.

To meet the demands of a growing student population, changing local and international economic conditions, the Egyptian education system is in need of an overhaul. For this to happen, the government should take the necessary legal and administrative measures to make education an investor-friendly sector.

The writer is chairman of the Alexandria Businessmen's Association.

## Basking in success

A pillar of the economic reform programme, foreign exchange companies enter their fifth year of activity in the Egyptian market with mixed feelings. **Shahira Samy** assesses their performance

Few could have been more surprised than foreign exchange company representatives themselves with their success over the past four years following the government's introduction of economic liberalisation measures in 1991.

While the government's reform initiatives aimed at abolishing the thriving currency exchange black market and stabilising the Egyptian pound in relation to other major currencies, most notably, the US dollar, four years of growth and change have yielded more than expected. Currency exchange companies have managed to attract 28.9 per cent (\$3.13 billion) of the total hard currency sources.

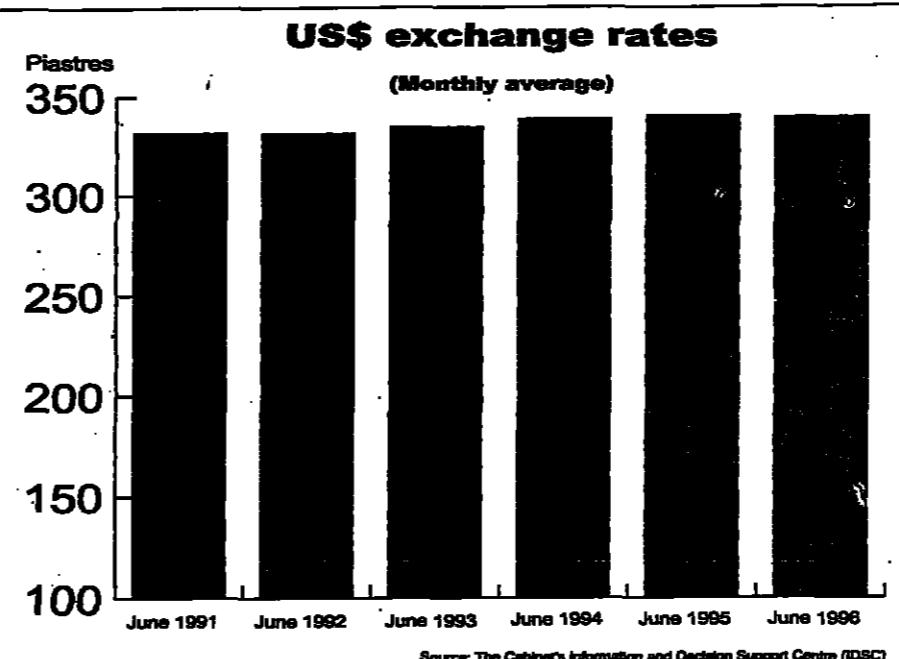
According to Ismail Hassan, governor of the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE), foreign exchange companies operating in Egypt annually inject up to 25 per cent of the CBE's foreign currency reserves. The CBE's reserves, over the past year, totalled \$18.3 billion compared to \$16.8 billion the year before.

The financial contribution by these companies to the CBE's reserves is not the only thing growing since the Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade (now the Ministry of Economy and International Cooperation) passed a decree in 1991 allowing non-banking sector companies to deal in foreign currency exchange. Over the past five years, the number of foreign exchange companies has rocketed to 90, with 106 other affiliated branches in operation.

At first, when the decree was passed and companies like this began to enter the market, said Ibrahim El-Mizlawi, the owner of the Misr Exchange Company, the first to enter this new market, "rumours abounded about the skyrocketing value of the dollar, people's reaction to these companies and how to set the correct value of the currencies." However, years of trial and not much error have proven that these companies provide an invaluable service to the national economy. El-Mizlawi added that not only have foreign exchange companies brought in revenue and eliminated the black market, but they have also helped reshape the population's attitude about saving foreign currencies.

Even so, however, government officials continue to argue over doing too much of a good thing. Although applications for licensing new companies have been extended in Cairo and other large cities, the government has decided not to allow additional companies to operate in Cairo, Giza, Alexandria and Port Said. These four governorates play host to roughly 75 per cent of all foreign currency companies operating in Egypt.

Rather, the government is attempting to encourage new growth in less privileged areas, a decision with which El-Mizlawi, who feels the market can absorb many more newcomers



ers, differs.

Other efforts by large currency exchange companies to open offices in neighbouring Arab countries have also met with failure. Arguing that these initiatives would be against the law, government officials explained that should such a move occur, copious problems relating to varying exchange rates and regulatory measures would emerge. The CBE, officials maintain, would not be able to carry out its duties efficiently in this new climate.

Currency exchange company representatives, however, find this a bitter pill to swallow. Branch offices in Arab countries, they stress, would facilitate the transfer of funds by Egyptians working in Arab countries.

However, counters the CBE's Hassan, "Transfers of funds from one country to another is a banking sector responsibility. Foreign currency exchanges were established to prove that banks were not monopolising the foreign currency market, not to perform tasks earmarked for banks."

But some company officials like Sayed Abdel-Mohsen, manager of the Arab Group for Exchange, say the issue is not so clear-cut. For example, to transfer funds between their head offices and their branches, foreign exchange companies need to go through the banking sys-

tem, which is a time-consuming and expensive process. Abdel-Mohsen and others interviewed by the *Weekly*, feel it would be more efficient to circumvent the costly bank transfer channel.

Although he pointed out that market needs may dictate changes in regulations, the CBE's Hassan, said no additions will be made to the responsibilities of foreign exchange companies in the near future.

However, he said that "on the whole, establishing foreign exchange bureaus has been a successful experience. They have contributed considerably in stabilising foreign currency markets and have complemented the activities of banks," he stated.

Despite some obstacles, however, investors in foreign currency bureaus find that business is still booming, albeit at a slower rate than in 1991. Statistics reveal that in 1991, the average daily business for each company was \$1 million, but in 1992, this figure dropped to \$200,000 and finally reached \$100,000 per day per company in 1993.

Aside from increased competition, this drop was the result of, say analysts, a decrease in Egyptian exports which coincided with an increase in imports. In 1994, the value of Egyptian exports equalled nearly \$4 million while imports reached \$12 million.

Other contributing factors were declining revenues from the Suez Canal coupled with a decreasing volume of funds transfer by Egyptian expatriates, many of whom returned home following the Gulf War.

Although exchange company officials were dismayed at the 1-2 per cent per dollar drop in their profit margin, El-Mizlawi said this decline was only natural given the transitional period. "It's the price of freedom," he explained, referring to the government's liberalisation measures.

The government has so far been careful not to render this price too high. With almost 80 per cent of transactions taking place through the dollar, the CBE has been working in the background, buying and selling to ensure that no major fluctuations in the currency values occur. However, Ismail Hassan, who dub this process as "passive intervention", says this only occurs upon request by the banks.

But, there's more to these companies' success than passive intervention, or even small exchanges by individuals. "We focus on tourism, export and import companies which are regular companies," said Raafat Saqr, deputy chairman of the Alexandria International Currency Exchange Company. "That's why we try to attract their business by offering them special rates."

The CBE's role and regulations despite some obstacles they present, add other company officials, are really for the benefit of all the parties involved. Even so, there are some wrinkles to be ironed out. The single price policy for exchange rates in both the company headquarters and branch offices, stated Abdel-Mohsen, should be revised. Branch offices, he noted, could do better business by offering a slightly different rate of exchange.

"We should be given more leeway and responsibilities so as to offer better service to our clients," he said.

And bureaucracy — that red, governmental devil — again seems to be a cause for concern among currency exchange company owners. "Since we have installed a computer system to store our records and communicate with the CBE," asked the co-owner of a major exchange company, "why is it necessary to waste time and effort sending them written reports three times a day?"

The most significant change owners of exchange bureaus would like to see materialise is the formation of some sort of official body that will represent their interests. Although the Egyptian Chamber of Commerce has a special division for foreign exchange companies, El-Mizlawi, who is also a board member of this committee, asserts that it is fairly inactive and must play a greater role in the future.

## Few buyers for beer

An unexpectedly weak demand for shares of Al-Ahram Beverage Company has raised questions and concerns about the company's future, reports **Shereen Abdel-Razek**

While investors flocked to purchase shares of other recently-privatised companies, Al-Ahram Beverage Company (ABC) has not been so fortunate. The six day subscription period, in which investors were afforded the chance to buy up to 20 per cent of the company's shares, closed with only 66,700 shares sold out of the total 920,000 offered.

The main reason behind the lagging demand, believes Mohamed Bakir, head of the privatisation unit in ABC's parent company, the Holding Company for Housing, Tourism and Cinema, stems from a misunderstanding. Upon evaluating the company, it was discovered that its real estate accounted for two-thirds of the value of its assets. Consequently, the earnings per share would be low as the shares are over-valued and do not reflect the company's real performance level. In a bid to compensate for this, the Higher Ministerial Privatisation Committee shifted the ownership of the land to the HCHTC which, in turn, leased it to ABC. This step, however, was misinterpreted by investors who thought that the company was selling its assets because it was suffering a loss and refrained from buying into ABC.

But, said Bakir, this move actually increased the earnings per share to about 11 per cent compared to the three or four per cent that would have been realised prior to this move.

Market observers cited a different reason for the low demand for ABC's shares. Some believe that many investors were unwilling, for religious reasons, to buy into a company that produces beer. ABC is Egypt's sole producer of beer.

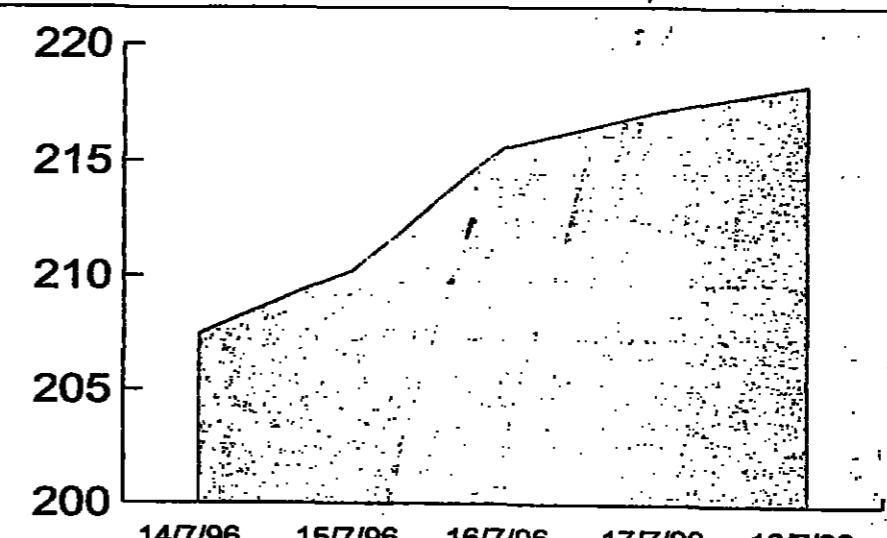
Whatever the reason, negotiations are currently under way between company representatives, banks and insurance companies to buy up the remaining shares for sale, said Bakir. The HCHTC is also considering other offers for majority stake purchases. "We are now seeking an offer which is made up of a financial and technical package," he said. "What we really need is a company with the know-how that can upgrade ABC's production lines."

In February, ABC's holding company sent out an invitation for bids to sell a majority stake in the company to an anchor investor. The negotiating team formed by HCHTC had already rejected two bids submitted by anchor investors which they deemed too low.

In the first half of fiscal year 1995-96, ABC posted after-tax profits of LE31.62 million. In fiscal 1994-95, after-tax profits had totalled LE42.96 million. While Bakir declined to give figures on the company's assets, market experts estimate their value at LE450 million.

## Market report

### GMI rockets up



(MNHD) bid to purchase 65 per cent of El-Kahera Housing and Development Company (KHD) paid off for both companies. Shares of the KHD registered the market's highest increase in share value with an LE27 per share jump. Those of the MNHD gained LE16.5 to close at LE13.5.

Foreign investor potential interest in purchasing the Commercial International Bank's depository receipts, which are to be traded on the London Stock Exchange this week, has fuelled domestic demand for shares in the bank. CIB's shares gained LE13.5 to level off at LE417.5. Shares of the Port Said Investment and Industrial Development Company, however, suffered the heaviest loss, declining by 14.25 per cent of their opening value to close at LE92.14.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

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*Entretien avec un champion du monde*

Rédacteur en Chef

Exécutif

Mohamed Salmawy

Président et Rédacteur en Chef

Ibrahim Nafie

كذا من الأصل

# Home at last

A German-brokered swap deal marks the first breakthrough this year in tensions between Hizbullah and Israel, writes Zehna Khodr from Beirut

A German-mediated swap deal for prisoners exchange between Hizbullah and Israel was pulled off this week despite a last-minute snag which threatened to scuttle the operation.

Observers and the media gave different interpretations as to the significance of the exchange and how it will affect South Lebanon and the Middle East.

Bona fide has proved that its "critical dialogue" with Iran, which has been criticised, is fruitful. Bona fide enjoys good ties with Tehran, which supports and funds Hizbullah.

Under the deal, Hizbullah was to hand over the remains of two Israeli servicemen, Rachamin Al-Sheikh and Yossi Fink, to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). ICRC officials received the remains in two metal coffins in Beirut's southern suburbs. They then handed the bodies to German officials headed by top intelligence chief Bernhard Schmidbauer at Beirut International Airport. Schmidbauer had sealed the agreement two days earlier after holding talks in Beirut and Damascus. Syria is the main power broker in Lebanon with 35,000 troops in the country.

Hizbullah also handed over to the ICRC 17 prisoners belonging to the Israeli-allied South Lebanon Army (SLA).

The deal reportedly stipulated that once Schmidbauer takes custody of the remains of the soldiers and flies to Is-

rael; Israel will simultaneously free prisoners from the Khiam detention centre in Israeli-occupied South Lebanon and return the bodies of martyrs who died in clashes with Israeli forces on the border.

The German military plane took off in the morning with the remains of the soldiers. But there was no prisoner exchange at Kfardebian border crossing, some 30 Kilometres south of Beirut, until late in the afternoon. The crossing, manned by SLA militiamen, is one of five that lead into the Israeli-occupied zone in the south.

The 15-hour delay was because the 17

freed prisoners refused to return to occupied South Lebanon. After being released in Beirut, they were taken by the ICRC to Kfardebian where they waited in Red Cross vehicles parked a couple of kilometres from the border crossing. ICRC officials said they were free to decide on their own if they wanted to re-enter the occupied zone.

The entire process nearly broke down since Israel and the SLA insisted on their return. Families and relatives of some of the prisoners live in Beirut and other places outside the Israeli-occupied areas. Each of the 17 prisoners had their own reason for not wanting to go back through their main concern was for their safety. They also did not want to be re-integrated into the SLA militia.

Many of the freed captives had been held for more than 10 years without trial. Physical and psychological torture are sys-

tematic at Khiam, a hilltop jail in the south run by the SLA under Israeli supervision.

Negotiations for Sunday's exchange reportedly began four months ago. Schmidbauer said he will continue efforts to achieve a comprehensive solution to the issue of missing Israeli servicemen in Lebanon and the Arab prisoners Israel holds



A member of Hizbullah carries the coffins of dead fighters ahead of the mass funeral held last Tuesday (photo: Reuters)

## Will the leopard change its spots?

Mahgoub Othman welcomes Egypt's gestures of goodwill towards Sudan, but warns that the Khartoum regime is unlikely not respond in kind

It is a happy coincidence that we discuss this week, on the anniversary of the Egyptian revolution, the prickly subject of Egyptian-Sudanese relations. It was the Egyptian revolution that created a radically new basis for Egyptian-Sudanese relations. It marked a radical departure from old perceptions of Sudan as a subject nation. Sudan, for the first time in history, was treated as a sovereign nation, with an independent and unique identity quite distinct from Egypt's. It was — and this is a truism that every Sudanese acknowledges — the 23 July revolution that initiated the wise decision to grant the Sudanese people the right to national self-determination, which eventually led to the independence of Sudan in 1956.

What is different today is the totally new charged atmosphere that looms over Egyptian-Sudanese relations. This was softened somewhat in recent weeks by President Hosni Mubarak's friendly initiative and his extension of an invitation to Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir to visit Egypt and attend the Cairo Arab Summit last month. There are many in both Egypt and Sudan who see this new development as heralding a new beginning, a fresh start in Egyptian-Sudanese relations. However, there are others who see that the Bashir regime has not mended its ways and that, therefore, Cairo should not open a new chapter in its relations with Khartoum.

Relations between the people of Egypt and Sudan are long-standing, indeed eternal. They are characterised by strategic depth and are not dependent on fluctuations in relations between the leaderships in Cairo and Khartoum. There are eight other countries that border Sudan, but the Sudanese opposition has chosen Cairo as its central base for political operations.

The Sudanese opposition, represented by the umbrella National Democratic Alliance, recognises that Egypt conducts itself as a nation state and not as a political party when it comes to tackling Sudanese issues. As long as the Sudanese government feigns innocence of the accusations levelled against it, Egypt is obliged to try and woo Sudan back into the Arab fold and ease tensions between Cairo and Khartoum. The Sudanese opposition forces are aware of this fact. They realise that it is realpolitik. But that does not stop them from voicing concern about the goings on in Sudan. In short, the Sudanese opposition is determined to highlight certain key issues that cannot be overlooked.

Firstly, never in the modern history of Sudan has a regime emerged which has shown such hostility towards Egypt as the current Bashir regime has. Secondly, after six years of hard and concerted efforts, the Sudanese opposition has succeeded in isolating Khartoum internationally and regionally — both in the Arab and the African arenas. It has also succeeded in mobilising the vast majority of the Sudanese people against the regime. Thirdly, there are strong indications that the regime has reached the brink. It has failed to give the Sudanese people anything but hunger, deprivation, economic mismanagement, the collapse of the Sudanese economy and the paralysis of the state services. Fourthly, it is impossible and too late for the regime to alter its ideological orientation. The leopard will not change its spots.

The leaders of the Sudanese opposition do not hide their concern over the signs of rapprochement between Cairo and Khartoum. A clear definition must be established of what Egypt wants from Sudan and what Sudan wants from Egypt. The definition must be based on the experience of the relationship between the two countries and must take into account the interests of each.

The writer is a former Sudanese minister of national guidance.

## Bill maddens EU

The US Senate has moved to punish foreign businesses that invest in Iran and Libya, reports Rasha Saad

The US Iran-Libya Oil Sanctions Bill supported by the Clinton administration, outlines sanctions to be imposed on foreign firms that invest \$40 million or more in key sectors of both Libya and Iran, two countries accused by the United States of sponsoring state terrorism.

Similar to the new law that penalises foreign companies investing in Cuba, the Iran-Libya bill has been strongly criticised by US allies who say the US is trying to unilaterally force trade policies on them.

Under the Senate bill, foreign firms would face sanctions if they contribute to the two countries weapons production, their industries or their aviation capabilities.

In the event that a foreign firm violates the ban, the president would be directed to choose two of six possible sanctions: denying export-import bank loans,

denying export licences, barring US firms from making loans of more than \$10 million a year to sanctioned parties, barring sanctioned financial institutions from being primary dealers of US government bonds, banning US government procurement of goods and services from sanctioned entities, and imposing import sanctions.

European Commission President Jacques Santer said that Europe is ready to act against the US bill.

Santer said that the Iran-Libya bill creates an even graver problem because 20 per cent of Europe's crude oil comes from both countries. In 1994, EU nations imported 483 million tons of crude oil, of which 48 million came from Iran and 51 million from Libya.

Santer also criticised the US for presuming to "legislate in extraterritorial matters" and de-

scribed the bill as "unacceptable".

Arab press reports indicated that the conflict of interests between Europe and the US intensified after the 1991 Gulf War and the victory of the US-led forces; Europe feels that the US makes unilateral decisions according to its own interests and then forces its Western allies to implement them.

Observers believe that Europe will always reject the notion of being blindly led by the US even if it is the only super power at the present time.

Arab observers have criticised the double-standard policies of the US. They believe that the US is lobbying to impose sanctions on Libya, Iran and Cuba, while at the same time it has exercised pressure on Arab countries to end their boycott against Israel under the pretext that this boycott violates international con-

ventions and will lead to a counter-reaction from the isolated country.

Both Libya and Iran did not comment on the US bill. However they previously condemned it when it was first suggested last year.

Iran said that sanctions would not affect its economy as much as it would cause great losses to the US and European companies. It also accused President Clinton of trying to win Jewish votes in the upcoming presidential elections.

The bill also coincided with the UN decision to extend air and diplomatic sanctions against Libya for another two months. Libya criticised the decision and the US rejection of any compromise to solve the Lockerbie issue and save thousands of Libyans who are suffering due to the sanctions.

The three Western countries concerned with the Lockerbie issue — the US, France and Britain —

did not issue a joint communiqué to announce the extension of sanctions against Libya as was the case on previous occasions.

Libyan-French relations witnessed an important development recently when Libya allowed a French magistrate to investigate the bombing of the French UTA airline over the Sahara Desert in September 1989.

The Libyans hoped that their warm welcome to the French will positively affect Libya's position in the Lockerbie issue. However, there has been no sign of this.

According to press reports, France rejects the US notion of a new world order and believes that there are emerging powers such as Europe, Japan and China, that will offset US domination.

Since French President Jacques Chirac came into office last year, France has been trying to pursue an effective policy in the Middle East to match its economic pres-

## US to redeploy forces

The US is planning to move its forces in Saudi Arabia to remote locations, writes Hoda Tawfik from Washington

For United States President Bill Clinton's administration, it is a matter of the utmost importance in an election year to demonstrate to Congress and the American people that it is doing everything possible to protect people in uniform. Indeed, during the last four months of the election campaign, the pressing question facing the Clinton administration has been whether to remain in the Gulf and the Middle East as a whole, amid the increasing threat of terrorism against American forces and installations in the area.

On 25 June, 19 US air force personnel were killed and 364 injured when a massive car-bomb exploded at an apartment complex near the Dhahran air base. A somewhat similar incident occurred on 13 November 1995 at a US-staffed Saudi National Guard communication centre in Riyadh, where five of the seven killed and about half of the 60 wounded were Americans.

It is still unclear whether these terrorist acts portend more violence to come. But a senior US defence official said, "No matter what we do and how careful we are, there will be further attempts. And in all probability, some of these attempts will succeed. In a sense, like the one at Knob Tower."

Secretary of Defence William Perry said, "My answer to the question 'Should we stay in Saudi Arabia?' is yes... We are there because of the vital national security interests of the United States, for the protection of the world's oil reserves, for the security of the Gulf and the stability of the Middle East region, and for the containment of Iran."

A Saudi Arabian official in Washington said that his country will respond "positively" when US officials present a detailed plan for moving American troops from Saudi Arabian cities to more secure and remote military

and Iraq."

Perry called for "drastic changes" in the way American forces are deployed abroad. His new programme, called Force Protection Initiative, could cost millions, perhaps billions, of dollars and involve not only the redeployment of up to 4,000 troops within Saudi Arabia, but adjustments to US forces in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Turkey and Bosnia. Details of the plan will be presented within the next few weeks, but Perry said, "We want to move quickly to accomplish changes by the end of the summer."

A Saudi Arabian official in Washington said that his country will respond "positively" when US officials present a detailed plan for moving American troops from Saudi Arabian cities to more secure and remote military

air base at Al-Kharj, about 60 miles south of Riyadh. He also mentioned putting more fences, barbed-wire and guards at installations and establishing a combined intelligence centre — called a "fusion cell" — in Saudi Arabia that would bring together CIA and Saudi intelligence operatives.

"We have to seek out information about terrorists, about their plans, how they are funded," Perry said in press statements.

The State Department has already announced that it is withdrawing family members of military personnel from Saudi Arabia. A department official said, "We are mindful of the fact that there were a number of threats before the Khobar bombing against American installations." But the official said that it is up to the family mem-

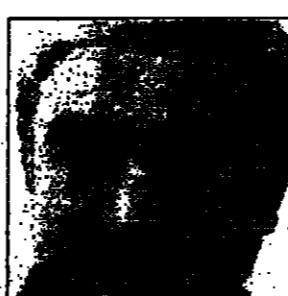
bers whether they want to leave or not and that the action is a precautionary measure. "There is nothing new, there is no new threat that led to this decision," the official said.

A senior US defence official said that the story that the Saudis will not support moving US forces from urban areas to more remote bases is simply wrong. "We have something like 6,000 military people in Saudi Arabia, some 5,000 of them doing air operations. The bulk of those can be moved from the bases where they are operating to more remote bases," said the official.

But there are some sections of the US military based in the kingdom which cannot be moved, with ease to remote areas. These are the ones which work with the Saudi National Guard and the Saudi military.

## FIS file "closed"

Algeria's national dialogue continues without the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and against a background of renewed violence, writes Amira Howeldy



As Algerian President Liamine Zeroual opened the fourth round of national dialogue talks in Algiers this week, a bomb exploded 40 km away, killing five people and injuring 30 others. The talks continued, but ignored the issue of violence and focused on Zeroual's suggestions for amending the constitution.

Zeroual met delegates from 12 political parties and agreed to set up three mixed-party commissions to prepare for a national political conference, a referendum on constitutional changes and legislative elections to be held early next year. Participants in the talks, however, expressed their disappointment with the lack of communication between them and the president who did not discuss means to stop the continuing violence.

Coming eight months after Zeroual was elected, the dialogue is the fourth in a series of attempts to put an end to the state of insurrection which broke out in 1992, after the cancellation of the elections that the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was poised to win. Since then between 60,000 and 70,000 people have died in the conflict.

The first round of reconciliation talks, held at the beginning of 1994, was sponsored by then provisional Prime Minister Ahmed Gherazi. The talks, which included the FIS, failed and were followed by the army's appointment of Zeroual — defence

minister at the time — to the presidency. Zeroual then held a second national dialogue involving the major political parties, including the FIS. But bilateral talks between the FIS and the military government failed due to mutual distrust. The FIS rejected the conditions laid down by Zeroual because it was only offered limited political participation in return for a pledge to renounce violence.

Last April, however, Zeroual decided to pursue the dialogue without inviting the FIS — whose leaders have been imprisoned since 1992. Although he did not make statements explicitly excluding them, his decision raised speculation on the political future of the banned group.

Zeroual's "Project for Institutional Reform" forwarded to political parties, organisations and institutions two months ago, put an end to the controversy as it proposed major amendments to the 1989 constitution, the political parties law and the election law which ban the formation of religious parties.

The memorandum also suggested the establishment of an appointed *Ummah Council*; besides the existing National Popular Council (NPC). Two months after Zeroual asserted that his memorandum is merely a "debatable suggestion", political party leaders regard it as good as a decree.

The memorandum also suggested the establishment of an appointed *Ummah Council*; besides the existing National Popular Council (NPC). Two months after Zeroual asserted that his memorandum is merely a "debatable suggestion", political party leaders regard it as good as a decree.

"When the government decides on something, it recruits everyone to bless its decisions," Abdel-Aziz Belhadj, former speaker of the NPC, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview from Algiers. "This is what the current talks or consultations are about."

Belhadj, who is also a member of the National Liberation Front's (FLN) central committee, said that his party has a set of priorities for dialogue concerning "how to put an end to the bloodshed, setting a framework for the coming elections and a comprehensive dialogue that includes all parties — without any exclusions." But he pointed out that "what does not seem to be important to everybody... [in the dialogue] we suggested methods to stop the violence but the government only talked about amending the constitution, the political parties law and the election law."

Asked about the aim of participating in repeatedly failed talks, Belhadj said, "We [the FLN] want to find a solution to put this violence at an end, but the government's formula has nothing to do with reality because the crisis is not a problem of texts, but of policies."

A possible scenario, according to Belhadj, is that Zeroual will pursue the talks with political organisations and syndicates, then begin bilateral talks with the parties which objected to the constitutional

amendments. This would be followed by a national reconciliation conference that would set the date for a public referendum for changing the constitution prior to the parliamentary elections expected to be held early next year.

Although many Algerian political parties, such as the Front for Socialist Forces (FFS), the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD), El-Nahda and Hama, back the FLN's stance, Zeroual's suggestions found support from others. The ex-communist Al-Tahid Party and the Republican National Alliance (ANR) together with the secular parties represented in the appointed NPC have voiced their approval for amendments, particularly the article which suggests banning the formation of religious parties.

Although attempts were made early last year by the major parties to pressure the government to accept the FIS's political participation, the army's firm grip on the government stood in the way. Since Zeroual's election, officials have explicitly stated that there will be no dialogue with the outlawed group. The latest statement in that respect was made by Zeroual himself during last week's talks. Zeroual said "the FIS file has been closed". The president's non-negotiable stance of "peace without the FIS" raises questions about his vision of a way out of the blood bath that claims the lives of at least 1,200 people each month.

The writer is a former Sudanese minister of national guidance.

# Black churches burn

In the last year and a half, 40 black churches have been burned down in the United States. Could such racist attacks be linked to a Republican Party resurgence in the American Deep South, asks David Du Bois

Religious institutions are among the most racially segregated institutions in the United States. On Sunday mornings blacks go to black churches and whites go to white churches. An occasional sprinkling of each in the other's congregations does not alter this overall pattern. Truly multi-racial congregations are exceedingly rare and invariably non-denominational. Only this year the 16-million member Southern Baptist Convention, the policy-making body of the largest Protestant denomination in America, officially apologised to black Baptists for its long-standing, anti-black racist policies and practices.

So, it should come as no surprise that in the current nationwide atmosphere of increasing racial-ethnic assertiveness, which has given rise to increasing racial separation, suspicion, antagonism and confrontation, black churches have again become the target of white supremacists' rage. It was the murder by fire-bombing in 1963 of four little black girls attending Sunday school at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, that alerted the nation to the horror of church burning and bombings in the South in the era of the civil rights movement.

Despite that alert, in the following summer 37 black churches were burnt down in the southern state of Mississippi alone. The Centre of Democratic Renewal, which monitors attacks against racial minorities and ethnic groups, reports that more than 80 black and multi-racial churches in 13 states have been fire-bombed, burned or vandalised since January 1990. Since January 1995, the number of black churches burned down stands at least at 40 in 13 states, and is rising. As of this writing the latest arson attack on a black church occurred in the northwest city of Portland, Oregon. The sanctuary of the Immanuel Christian Fellowship Church was completely destroyed by a deliberate

act of arson. Investigators, including agents from the Treasury Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, declined to discuss what evidence they had of arson. According to an Associated Press report on 21 June the congregation of the Immanuel Christian Fellowship Church is about 70 per cent black, and includes many Hispanics, Asians and a few whites. It is located in a predominantly black neighbourhood of Portland.

Historically the black church has been the single most important, most reliable and most regenerative refuge from the daily white racist insult and injury black Americans continually suffer in the US, physically and spiritually. This is true particularly throughout the southern states. Consequently, during the civil rights struggles of the 1960s it was the black church that provided many of the most effective black leaders. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr being the most notable. It was to black churches, great and small, urban and rural, that blacks flocked to organise voting rights campaigns, bus boycotts, launch counter-demonstrations and civil rights marches, and to coordinate activities locally, regionally and nationally. It was to the black church that they came to eulogise and bury murdered victims, and to reaffirm their determination to continue the struggle. Many believe this is why black churches have been a prime target of white racists.

Reliance on federal agencies — the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms — to investigate the fires and bring the perpetrators to justice was made necessary because nothing or very little was being done to find the culprits by local, county and state law enforcement personnel in the states affected. The experience of the 1960s established that most often, particularly throughout the South, local, county and state law enforcement personnel were

directly involved in racist attacks, often directed them and almost always knew the individuals in their areas most likely to be responsible for violence against the black community. Today civil rights advocates are demanding, therefore, that the current federal investigators concentrate on local, county and state law enforcement bodies and individuals for information about the current rash of black church burning.

US News & World Report of 24 June quotes Rev. Joseph Lowry of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a leading black civil rights organisation, as saying: "We have been sorely disappointed that until recently law enforcement... [has] seemed only mildly interested in focusing on these acts of terrorism." Within the black community there is much resentment at the insistence of the newly arrived federal investigators to focus on pastors and parishioners of the churches attacked, suggesting insurance fraud or deliberate provocation. Civil Rights leaders are asking why the leaders and members of the local Klu Klux Klans and other white racist organisations, all well known in the southern white communities, are not being seriously pursued and questioned.

During the year and a half of the current rash of black church burning, black leaders have noted a surprising upsurge of Republican Party influence and political assertiveness throughout the South. Since the overthrow of the Republican Party's post-Civil War reconstruction effort to forge a place in the "American dream" for the newly freed and impoverished former slave by a coalition of southern Democrats and northern industrialists, "the solid South" has been traditionally allied to the Democratic Party. David S Broder, writing in the International Herald Tribune of 18 June, asserts: "The transfer of the Republican power base from the Midwest and Northeast to the South is the

single most important transformation in the Republicans' 20th century history."

US News & World Report writes: "The South's takeover of Capitol Hill is now complete... Senate Republicans last week chose Mississippi's Trent Lott to succeed Bob Dole [Republican Party presidential hopeful] as majority leader. And they picked Oklahoma's Don Nickles for the No. 2 job, majority whip. With the House [of Representatives] already in the hands of a Georgian — Speaker Newt Gingrich and two Texans, Majority Leader Dick Armey and Majority Whip Tom DeLay — Southerners have their strongest hold on congressional leadership in decades."

Martin Woolacott writing in the *Guardian Weekly* of 30 June under the heading "Old Habits Die Hard in the Deep South" asserts: "The Republicans strive to imply that the Democrats are the creators, subsidisers and appeasers of a criminalised, welfare-dependent black society in the inner cities of the United States... This is the message that links all the ostensibly non-racial issues like welfare, big government, the death penalty and family values together. While related debates go on in countries that have smaller or no racial minorities, in the US race is the knot that ties the package up."

This is a classic example of political scapegoating: "The blacks are the cause of all our domestic ills." The success of this Republican Party effort is evident in the two-year swing from Democratic to Republican influence throughout the South, where indigenous, anti-black racism has never been rooted out. There are those who believe President Bill Clinton will lose his bid for re-election in November as a result of the Republican Party effectively using "the race card" nationally. The burning of black churches may only be a harbinger of worse things to come in this election year.

## Famine looms in southern Sudan

Alarm bells have been sounded that famine is about to break out in south Sudan, reports Mariz Tadros

For the south Sudanese, survival is becoming increasingly difficult. During the last two weeks two dozen people living in the small town of Maridi, southwest Sudan, have been killed or wounded by the Sudanese army's aerial bombings. Several hundred thousand more are on the brink of starvation because of a government ban on Hercules C-130 relief aircraft flying over the south. Many more are dying in the famine gripping the Nuba mountains in the west because Khartoum has prevented any relief aid from reaching them.

Last week the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), an extremist Ugandan Christian force, entered the United Nations refugee camp of Aishi Piti in Uganda and slaughtered at least 150 south Sudanese. The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) spokesman, Fagan Amum, in Nairobi said, that a further 2,000 were captured and taken to the Sudanese government camp in Torit in southeast Sudan, which Amum claims is a training centre for the LRA.

Conditions in south Sudan have reached rock bottom, according to the United Nations Food Programme, which warns of a widespread famine breaking out there. The organisation has protested that as a result of the Sudanese government's refusal to allow food-dropping aircraft to fly over the south, 700,000 people will soon be dead. UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali charged the Sudanese government with "unilateral and unjustified obstruction of urgently required humanitarian assistance" to the south.

The Sudanese government has denied accusations that it is trying to starve the south. "The government would like to express its surprise and sorrow and would like to confirm the keenness of the Sudanese government to deliver relief to all persons affected by the war in the south," a Foreign Ministry statement said.

The latest report from the US-based Human Rights Watch on political repression in Sudan concedes that there are abuses by all parties in the war, including the SPLA.

Following the World Food Programme's complaints, Khartoum has partially lifted the ban it imposed in June 1995 on Hercules C-130 planes delivering aid to the south Sudanese. The ban was enforced on the pretext that such large planes were used to deliver arms to the SPLA, with which the government has been engaged in a bloody war for the last 13 years.

However, Abdou Agaw, acting chairman of the Cairo-based Sudanese Human Rights Organisation, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Khartoum's apparent concession is unconvincing. Hercules C-130 planes will be allowed to fly only one at a time and only until the end of July. Agaw insists that the Sudanese government's proposal that the World Food Programme's Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) — the principal source of relief aid for the south — rely on smaller aircraft and on road transport for food delivery could only be seen "as a deliberate policy to annihilate the people by starving them". Apart from the Hercules planes, the OLS has only two Indian light planes at the airport at Lokichokio, a Kenyan town 20 miles from the Sudanese border. "These light planes have the capacity to carry between seven and 12 people. How on earth would they be able to deliver food for the millions starving?" Agaw said.

Agaw rejected allegations that Hercules C-130 planes may have been used at any point to carry arms to the SPLA, saying that the Sudanese government has never been able to find any evidence to prove this. The SPLA is only supposed to provide protection for relief workers delivering supplies in SPLA-held territory, and Agaw insists that it is not involved in the distribution or administration of aid. "All the relief workers are foreign. They have sworn to keep out of the conflict and have no interest in arms delivery whatsoever," explained Agaw.

The most tragic situation of all, perhaps, results from the Sudanese government's prohibition of any relief aid reaching the millions of civilians living in areas which have an SPLA presence. In the western regions of Bahir Al-Ghazal and the Nuba mountains, many have died from hunger and hunger-related causes.

"Every day more and more people in the Nuba mountains die because the government refuses to allow a drop of aid to go in, in an attempt to annihilate them," Agaw said. The Nuba mountains is one of the SPLA's strongest bases and demands for autonomy there have been most rigorous. The Sudanese government blames rebel resistance for the people's suffering. The outcome of 13 years of sporadic fighting between Sudan's Arab north and Christian and animist south has forced many to leave their homes and seek refuge in the north or in camps run by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees — mostly found across the border in Uganda and Kenya.

"This constant insecurity, directly caused by government militia forces who raid and capture and kill, means that people can no longer lead normal lives. They are unable to cultivate land and feed themselves. Natural factors such as floods and droughts exacerbate the situation further," said Agaw, adding that forcing hunger upon the people has been one of the weapons used against the population of south Sudan throughout the war.

Soliman Bakheet, head of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) — the SPLA's political wing — in Egypt, told the *Weekly* that members of the Sudanese army and the Popular Defence Forces, the government-sponsored militias, have been regularly boarding and looting relief supplies as well as harassing aid workers, making it impossible for them to distribute aid in certain areas. "The only way to stop the suffering is the imposition of strict international sanctions that would force the democratisation of the government in Sudan and force the authorities to assess their human rights record in the south," suggested Bakheet.

Former Sudanese Minister of National Guidance Mahgoub Othman also supports economic sanctions against the Sudanese government. Othman told the *Weekly* that the Sudanese opposition as well as the people in the south support sanctions "since southerners could not be worse off than they are now. Sanctions will only affect the interests of the government. The people, be they in the north or in the south, have nothing more to lose. They have lost everything. The proof is the outbreak of famine."



Nicaraguan troops patrolling the border with Honduras mingle with villagers. Rearmed Contra troops are alleged to have kidnapped villagers and to have spirited them across the border into Honduras (photo: AFP)

## Colombia risks drug barons' wrath

This week, Colombia's President Ernesto Samper received death threats as he reopened the debate on permitting Colombian drug traffickers to stand trial in America. Can the cycle of violence in the South American nation be stemmed, wonders Sayed Awad

Colombia is one of the most violent countries in the world. A murder is committed there every 20 minutes. Official statistics for 1995 show that more than 21,000 people were killed in Colombia in violent incidents and car accidents. One of the most horrific examples of this phenomenon was a massacre which occurred last June in the northwestern city of Medellin, leaving 18 people dead and 10 wounded. The total amount of ransom money taken in Colombia reached \$2.8 million last year.

Colombia suffers from violence connected to hired killers, revolutionary Marxist groups and armed militias that work for drug barons. Murder, kidnapping and armed bank robbery have become independent industries. Severe violations of human rights by the police and armed forces in their raids on drug cartels add to the problem. The raids involve massive destruction of land where narcotic plants are grown and heavily-armed techniques. It is in this context that the nominal head of the Non-Aligned Movement, President Ernesto Samper of Colombia, has been hit by numerous death threats following his de-

cision to reopen the debate on allowing Colombian drug traffickers to stand trial in the United States. Suspected "extraditables" — as the drug traffickers who are wanted to stand trial in American courts are called in Colombia — are literally up.

Colombia is not considered a major drug-producing country, but it is responsible for the preparation and smuggling of 80 per cent of the estimated \$10-12 billion worth of drugs that enter the United States and Canada each year. The cities of Medellin and Cali are the main centres for drug barons, who provide the Colombian economy with \$7 billion annually — more than the amount petrol brings in to the South American country.

The lucrative gains which can be made from the drug trade mean that hundreds of thousands of families plant more coca shrubs than any other crop. In order to protect the illegal industry, drug cartels have attracted more than 50,000 people into armed and organised militias that operate chiefly in the cities on the Caribbean coast. The cartels also control special assassination groups which mur-

der and kidnap politicians, media people, judges and labour union members. Drug dealers have been able to find protection from various sources. There are many government officials who benefit financially from the drug cartels, and whoever resists the temptation of drug money pays the price with his life orifice.

The ability of the drug-smuggling networks to infiltrate police departments is well known. Their influence extends to important figures in the executive and parliament. In the country's biggest political scandal, drug dealers disclosed evidence that the current president of Colombia and his top assistants had made a deal with a gang in Cali, offering it millions of dollars to finance a 1994 presidential campaign in exchange for promises to be lenient in dealing with them and not to extradite them to the US. Since 1989, the drug barons have been waging a bloody war on the government which has led to the deaths of thousands of people and the destruction of the national economy.

Despite the demise of leftist groups in neighbouring countries, Colombia is still

home to a number of Marxist organisations. The Armed Revolutionary Forces, which date back to 1949, are still considered the biggest rebel organisation. It controls many areas and provides many Indian families with safe havens. The National Liberation Army, founded in 1960, specialises in exploding oil pipes, while the Simon Bolívar Group targets the government political elite, the security forces, government centres, industry, big landowners and company executives, who they accuse of being supported by American imperialism. Both groups justify violence by saying that they want to change the social reality by directing a war against the state. Lately, a previously unknown organisation called Colombia's Dignity has appeared on the scene, claiming responsibility for the kidnapping of the president's brother because of his involvement in corruption.

The drug barons have manipulated anti-imperialist slogans as a cover for their activities. They provide leftist groups with financial backing in exchange for the latter's protection of the drug trade. The violent operations under-

taken by the leftist groups sometimes cover crimes committed by the drug dealers, a practice that prevents the government from concentrating its efforts on drug trafficking.

The US has recently threatened to impose economic sanctions against Colombia because of government leniency towards the drug cartels. But, in fact, the US and other countries of the North carry a double responsibility. On the one hand, they are the main centres for drug demand. On the other, they act to reduce the price of Southern countries' main income source — raw materials — and so weaken the economies of the Third World. Northern governments also ignore the money-laundering operations that convert illegal drug earnings into respectable bank account numbers in their countries. The amount of drug money laundered each year is estimated by experts at more than \$200 billion. Meanwhile, industrialised countries are the ones which control the arms trade that provides drug cartels and drug distribution networks with their weapons. The same nations also sell the chemical substances used in drug manufacturing.

## Americans anger their allies

CANADIAN officials cautiously welcomed United States President Bill Clinton's decision to freeze for six months the measure that allows Americans to sue foreign firms doing business with Cuba, reports Dina Abdel-Hafeez. The US had last week sanctioned a Canadian firm under the controversial Helms-Burton law, provoking threats of retaliation from America's allies, including Canada, Mexico and the European Union nations.

The Clinton administration last week informed nine executives working for the Canadian mining company Sheritt International that they were barred from visiting the US. Two of these executives are prominent British businessmen. The action meant that the Toronto-based company was the first to be sanctioned under the Helms-Burton law, which allows non-American companies that sell, buy or benefit from US property confiscated after Castro's revolution to be sued in American courts. Clinton passed the law in March, less than a month after Cuba shot down two American civilian airplanes.

The law includes terms denying US visas to foreign businessmen who "traffic" in US property which Castro's government nationalised after 1959.

While the US continues a trade embargo against Cuba, Canada, Mexico and Europe are of the opinion that by investing in the Caribbean nation, they are giving the Cuban government a chance to remain on the path to reform.

The decision to sanction the Canadian company caused tensions to rise between the US and some of its trading partners. The United Kingdom delivered a fiercely worded protest to the American State Department over what it called a "disgraceful and preposterous" blacklisting of the two British nationals, while Sir Leon Brittan, the EU's trade commissioner, denounced the law as "extraterritorial and discriminatory".

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien authorised the preparation of retaliatory measures that would include allowing Canadians to sue any US company that uses the Helms-Burton law to attack Canadian companies doing business in Cuba. He also pledged to toughen federal law to protect Canadian firms.

"By penalising the investment interests of its closest allies, the US is damaging transatlantic relations and giving comfort to those who it seeks to challenge," said Ian Lang, British secretary of state for

trade and industry, in London. The British Foreign Office commented that the two British executives' business dealings were entirely legitimate in the eyes of the British, Canadian and Cuban governments. Lang told reporters, "This American action, which implies blackmail and forcing its foreign policies on its allies, is what angered Britain and Europe. Although we support the US's aim of bringing about democracy in Cuba, we reject the methods. It is one thing to want to punish the country directly, another to take an action against the companies of friendly powers that do not happen to share the American view."

According to a US report, between 100 and 200 companies are operating in Cuba on confiscated property and thus risk having their top executives barred from the US. Four British firms have already stopped operations in Cuba and pulled out of the country.

Sheritt International is not the only company facing accusations in the US. A Mexican firm and an Italian one have been identified by the US State Department as committing the offence of "trafficking in confiscated US property in Cuba". Mexico has protested against the Helms-Burton law saying that

Edited by Gamal Nkrumah

كذا من الأصل

Part 10: City of Lakeland, Florida

**Tomorrow, 40 years will have passed since Nasser uttered the words that were to shake the world and revolutionise Egypt and the Arab nation.**



*photo: Hassan Diab*

# 'Suez is ours'

# العاصيم شركة قناتة الاموال

# الأخضراء

## أموالنا وحقوقنا زدت علينا الرئيس يعقلن باسم الأمة

**قرار رئيس الجمهورية باعجم شركة النافورة**  
يُنقل للدولة ما لها من أعمال وحقوق ومتطلباتها من المؤشرات  
توفيق المعايير وتحل محل صغرى النافورة عما تكون بصمتها كأفضل لصالح  
غير إسلام الشركة وصغر قرارات جمهورية مصر في النافورة

فِرْسَةَ الْمُكَلَّبِ فَالْمُكَلَّبُ فِرْسَةٌ

Alexandria at the end of July is a holiday city, and, with its long palm-lined beaches, its brilliantly lit cafés and shops, a place of beauty and excitement. As Nasser made his way slowly along the sea road to Menshiyah Square in an open air car, picked out by a spotlight in the following car, thousands of Alexandrians and visitors lined the streets to cheer him. There was an electric feeling in the atmosphere, as though people were all unconsciously preparing to be partakers in high drama. Nasser was caught up by the excitement of the adventure on which he and the whole of Egypt were soon to be launched. When he spoke to the Cabinet and the RCC he had been grim and unsmiling. Now he was a different man, the popular leader, at one with his people, sharing their enthusiasm and showing that he shared it. [see photo above]

**photo above]** Nasser had not prepared the speech he was going to make, but only made a few notes. He began by looking back at Egypt's history, at the way in which throughout the ages its people had been exploited by one tyranny or another, foreign or native-born. After he had been speaking for about half an hour he told his audience that Eugene Black had reminded him of how the Khedive Said had given out the contract for the canal. 'But,' he said, 'de Lesseps imposed conditions on the Khedive. I am not the Khedive, and I am not willing to accept conditions.' The

**Article 1. Compagnie Universelle du Canal Maritime de Suez shall be nationalised as an Egyptian company and transferred to the state with all its assets and commitments. Article 2. The administration of navigational traffic in the Suez Canal shall be taken over by an independent body.' There were four more brief articles filling in details.**

**There was a moment of silent incredulity, as the significance of what they had just heard sank into the quarter of a million people crowded into Menshiyeh Square. Then pandemonium erupted and scenes of wild excitement broke out in towns and villages through the length and breadth of the land where millions had been clustered round their radios to listen to the President's speech. Nobody in Egypt slept much that night.**

*(Mohamed Hassanein Helkai in Cutting the Lion's Tale: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes, Andre Deutsch Limited. 1986. Reproduced in Al-Ahram Weekly courtesy of the author.)*





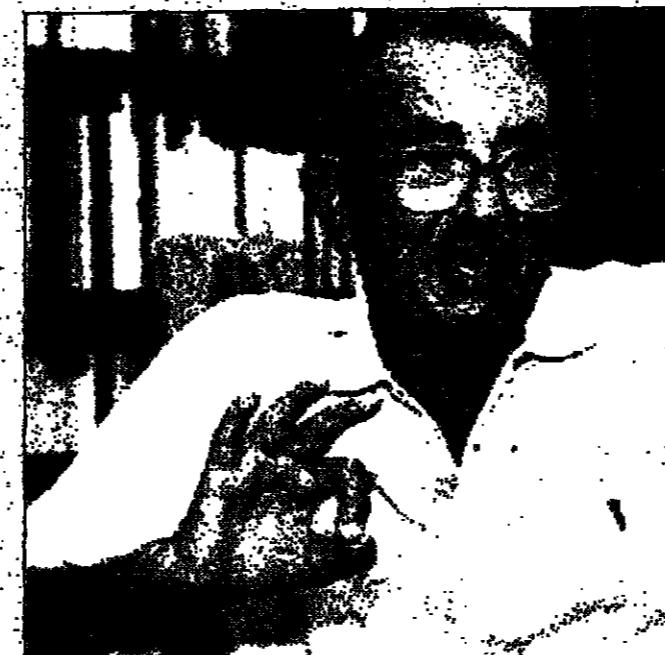


# They saw it happen

"In the name of the people, the Suez Canal Company shall be nationalised". Recordings of Nasser's fateful words continue to trigger a flutter of excitement in the hearts of millions of Egyptians. Dina Ezzat sought recollections of the day from people who were on hand to see, and join in, as history was being made



Kamal El-Din Hussein



Amin Howeidy



Ezzat Adel



Mahmoud Amin El-Alem



Amina Shafiq



Ma'moun El-Modelki

## Against all odds

A CALL from Nasser brought the news to me 24 hours before the nationalisation. He asked me, 'Kamal what do you think will happen if we nationalised the Suez canal? Do you think we should nationalise it?'

My response was spontaneous. I did not think twice. Immediately, I told him let's go ahead. There was no hesitation.

The canal is ours. We always knew that it was due with Egyptian blood and sweat. It belonged to us and we had every right to control it.

We wanted to build the High Dam. We had to build the High Dam. Egypt wanted to expand its agricultural zone. We wanted to modernise our industries. For this we needed water. We needed water to irrigate the fields and we needed water to generate electricity.

The nationalisation led to the construction of the High Dam and the High Dam opened the door for development.

I clearly remember that shortly before the nationalisation decision was made, an English diplomat serving in Cairo visited Israel and met with Ben Gurion to discuss Nasser. Ben Gurion asked the British official: 'What is that Nasser thinking about Israel?'

When the diplomat responded that Nasser is not thinking anything about Israel at the moment because he wants to focus on development

first, Ben Gurion told him: 'This is the worst news I have heard.'

I thought about this when Nasser was telling me that he was going to nationalise the Suez Canal.

The nationalisation was one of Nasser's most daring decisions. On that day, Nasser stood against all odds.

We all wanted to see the canal nationalised. We all believed that it would be silly to wait for 1968—the due date for the return of the canal to Egypt [under the concession agreement]. Why waste 10 years? Also we never really had any guarantee that the foreign company would stick to the commitment and hand over the canal on the due date.

When Nasser and I spoke on the phone we did not articulate these ideas in so many words because we knew them.

The nationalisation was really a good decision. Those who lived through it can never forget the glory that came to Nasser during that time.

It was a really glorious moment in history for Nasser.

The nationalisation was not just about the building of the High Dam; it was also about national pride. We were talking about liberation; and the nationalisation completed this liberation.

When Nasser nationalised the canal he rejected all attempts by the West to humiliate Egypt.

The joy we felt—everyone of us, every Egyptian—when the na-

tionalisation was declared was beyond words.

In his speech in Alexandria, Nasser said, 'In the name of the people I declare the nationalisation of the Suez Canal'. At that moment Nasser was everyone of us.

Of course there were the concerns about the West's reaction. Nasser assigned to me the task of forming the national liberation army to make sure that any attack would be responded to promptly.

Of course there was the tripartite aggression in October as a reaction from the Western forces to the nationalisation. Yes. This is all true. But there was no other alternative. And the people shared these feelings. They were joyous over the nationalisation and they were saying we will go to war if we have to.

I know that some people said that the nationalisation was a 'mis-calculated move', but they are simply wrong.

And in face of everything, Nasser never lost his poise. He never said we should not have done this. And the people were behind Nasser.

It is fascinating that I do not remember where I was when I got that call from Nasser. I do not remember when I was when he declared the nationalisation. I remember no details. All I remember is his voice on the phone telling me the news. And his voice declaring the nationalisation.

**Kamal El-Din Hussein**

Member of the Revolution Command Council

## A master stroke

AT THAT time I was still a student doing my summer internship in *Al-Ghad* (the generation) magazine.

We used to gather in the hallway next to the news room of *Akher Sa'* magazine to listen to Nasser's speeches because we did not have a radio in our news room and portable radios were rare at the time.

Listening to Nasser's speeches, especially those on 22 and 26 July were always a must.

But that year his speech was different. It was not the usual about the march towards development and increasing the national income.

From the beginning Nasser focused on the issue of building the High Dam. In his charismatic way he told the story of Western attempts to abort Egypt's plans to build the dam which was meant to boost both industry and agriculture. His narration was so dramatic; his voice rose in pitch.

So when he said his famous words 'In the name of the people I nationalise the Suez Canal' we were all ready to hear it and be thrilled with it.

Yet at the same time, we were all dumb-struck. It was most unexpected. It took us a while to actually react.

My first response was to pick up the phone and tell my family the news in case they had missed it.

I spoke with my illiterate grandfather who kept asking me if nationalisation means the canal belongs to Egypt.

On my way back home I rode on two buses. And on both buses people were talking about nothing else but the nationalisation. I heard women shouting on the buses.

On the bus, on the street, and back home there was one phrase repeated over and over again by everyone: 'It was a *darbat ma'alem*, a master stroke.'

And when the tripartite aggression hit, people stood up against it. At the time the radio waves did not reach Gaza. So I did not hear the news first hand.

It was on the evening of the day of nationalisation that the news started to spread. I was completely astounded I did not believe it. At first there was uncertainty. But everyone was talking about it.

The following morning it became a certainty, and all Egyptians were so happy. There is no doubt about it.

But everyone still believed that the nationalisation was a *darbat ma'alem*.

**Amina Shafiq**  
Member of the council of the press syndicate and senior editor at Al-Ahram.

## United we stood

I WAS at home listening carefully to Abdel-Nasser's speech and I had a feeling something was in the making. I felt it in the air that something was going to happen on that day.

It was obvious from a speech that Nasser made after the US withdrew its promises to support Egypt in building the High Dam. He did not say anything in that speech, but I could feel it from his words and the tone of his voice that he had a plan in mind.

Nasser had so much pride, so it would have been very unlikely him not to react. Then when he said it, in his 26 July speech, I was so thrilled.

The nationalisation of the Suez Canal has been on the platform of the Egyptian Communist Party since the early 1920s. It was a wish held by every Egyptian. So when Nasser announced it, there was an overall emotional upheaval across the nation.

Before the nationalisation I was one of Nasser's opponents. I was opposed to the non-democratic approach of what I

thought was more of a coup d'état than a revolution.

The nationalisation was a symbol of full liberation and it melted the ice between Nasser and the communists and the other forces of the left. We all stood together in a terrific manifestation of national unity. We had a feeling that we were walking into an overall confrontation with the Western imperialist forces and that we all had to be united.

Following the nationalisation, democracy was in full swing in Egypt. That was about the only time when the Egyptian Communist Party was allowed to publicly distribute its leaflets on the streets. It was a memorable time of cautious joy and joint struggle.

I remember setting up a headquarters to recruit volunteers to join the ranks of national liberation forces. I remember building contacts with residents of Port Said to gather information and send it to the official side.

And when the tripartite aggression hit, we were all there for each other.

**Mahmoud Amin El-Alem**  
Writer and literary critic



The battle for Suez had to be fought over and over again. Nasser at the front in 1968

photo: Hassan Diab

## It could've waited

THE NATIONALISATION of the Suez Canal was a clear wish to the heart of every Egyptian. It really meant a lot for every Egyptian to see the canal run and administered by Egyptians. The canal is a part of Egypt and no Egyptian would ever agree to see it under the control of a foreign staff.

I was in Gaza when Nasser declared the nationalisation. At the time the radio waves did not reach Gaza. So I did not hear the news first hand.

It was on the evening of the day of nationalisation that the news started to spread. I was completely astounded I did not believe it. At first there was uncertainty. But everyone was talking about it.

The following morning it became a certainty, and all Egyptians were so happy. There is no doubt about it.

But some people, whose reaction went beyond the mere euphoria over the development, were apprehensive. Nobody questioned the nationalisation act as such, but some indeed were concerned about the way it happened.

I do not think that we were well prepared for it. There were concerns of retaliatory actions by the Western powers and it happened at a time when we were not prepared enough for it.

Personally, I was so shocked to hear Nasser, in one speech that he made in 1965, saying that at the time the canal was nationalised Egypt had not yet trained even one single battalion to use the arms imported from Czechoslovakia. In other words we were along with the nationalisation scheme at a time when our army's combat readiness was questionable.

So, one cannot help but wonder: Could it not have waited for another year when the army would have been in a better shape?

Yes, it was a great move on the road of liberation that was greatly welcomed not only in Egypt but across the Arab world and Africa where the anti-imperialism trend was on the rise.

I am not at all underestimating the historic value of the nationalisation, but I just think it was miscalculated.

**Ma'moun El-Modelki**  
Spokesman for the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood.

## Thrilling shock

I WAS in my office in Cairo, listening to Nasser's speech in Alexandria on the radio. All of a sudden I heard him saying, 'In the name of the people I declare the nationalisation of the Suez Canal'.

I did not believe it. I just could not. It was a complete shock, a thrilling one. But the reaction of the people listening to his speech in Manshiya Square (Alexandria) made me realise that it was all true.

At the time I was working as commander of the Cairo military zone and I had not heard one word about it before. It was a closely guarded secret until the last minute. But I must say it took a while for the news to sink in.

Then my telephone rang. My wife was on the other end of the line. She was not calling to break the news; because when Nasser made a speech, the whole nation, actually all of the Arab world, listened to him. She was calling to express her delight. She was really happy. I was very happy, too.

We almost wept for joy as we talked on the phone.

But there was not much time for emotion. I had to attend to my duty to secure Cairo against any possible retaliatory attack from the West. We had to make sure that the entire city was secure and that there were enough supplies for emergencies.

The day of the nationalisation was a big day in the life of all Egyptians. I really saw the entire nation taking to the streets. There were men, women and children. They were all there expressing their support for Nasser and the revolution.

The nationalisation was one of Nasser's incisive moves against the imperialist West and it paved the way for the full liberation of Egypt. On that day he was the hero of the entire nation.

**Amina Howeidy**  
former minister of defence  
and former chief of the Intelligence Service.

## We felt so proud

I WAS not listening to the speech by Nasser on the radio because I was on my way to the train station to buy a ticket to Cairo. I was working as a school teacher in Alexandria. And that was the time for summer holidays so I wanted to visit my family in Cairo.

I thought that during Nasser's speech was a good time to go buy the ticket because when Nasser spoke everybody listened. Really, there is no exaggeration there. Especially at that time.

I was on the street and all of a sudden people swarmed all around me. There were so many of them. It was unbelievable.

They were shouting Nasser's name.

Initially, I did not know what was going on. I thought there was an attempt to assassinate the president.

But it did not take me very long to realise what was going on: the Suez Canal was nationalised.

I must say I completely forgot about the holiday for that day. It did not look like a good day to try and travel to Cairo.

Everybody was so happy. It was really a memorable day.

It is almost as memorable as the day of the revolution. People were in tears really. We felt so proud.

**Soad All**  
A retired school teacher.

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## ASEAN musings

How is it that ASEAN has emerged as the unrivalled showcase for Third World development, asks **Gamal Nkrumah**

Last weekend, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) concluded its annual ministerial meeting in the Indonesian capital Jakarta. Typically unceremonious and businesslike, the meeting stood in sharp contrast to other similar gatherings of Third World leaders insofar as having clearly defined goals and forward-looking strategic judgement. There is also a difference in perception about what a regional economic grouping is actually about. ASEAN's internationally acclaimed performance and prestige make it a far cry from the Organisation of African Unity, the Arab League and even the South Asian Regional Cooperation Council. ASEAN is the fourth largest trading partner after the United States, Japan and the European Union. ASEAN's exports and imports now have a combined total value of \$700 billion annually.

Whichever way we in the Third World turn — and we, or more precisely our leaders, have turned in a good number of conflicting directions since gaining independence from European colonial powers in the fifties and sixties — it seems that we can do little right on the economic front. The notable exceptions to our predicament have been the South East Asian tiger economies of ASEAN. Why? Between 1965 and 1995, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand grew at an average rate of seven per cent per annum — a rate well above the world average of around 3.5 per cent during the past three decades. Meanwhile, the Jakarta-based ASEAN secretariat disclosed that the current account deficits of the organisation's member-states decreased from \$11.4 billion in 1995 to \$4.2 billion.

in 1996. Projected collective ASEAN export growth rates for 1996 were estimated to total 16 per cent, bringing the total value of exports to \$350 billion.

The so-called free market development of ASEAN tiger economies seemed in the 1960s to be a gamble fraught with risks. Yet there is no getting around the fact that ASEAN's economic miracle was an inspiring success story. Yes, we can grumble about ruthless authoritarian regimes, regimental societies, exploitative labour laws and the stifling of civil liberties. But whatever the shortcomings, ASEAN today fares far better than any other region in the Third World. In fact its emerging markets do not, strictly speaking, need to be lumbered with the pejorative term "Third World" any more.

The tiger economies of South East Asia are often cited as exemplary models of free market or capitalist development. But what is often overlooked is that ASEAN's governments — read the state or public sector — played a central and critical role in energising the economies of the region. So contrary to common preconceived ideas, ASEAN's development could just as well be seen as a model of planned economic development.

What is unique about South East Asia, it is often said, is the way in which the political leadership worked hand in hand with entrepreneurs, both foreign and local. In other regions of the South, most notably Africa, South Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, it almost appears as if governments have conspired to thwart the emergence of an entrepre-

preneurial class — and in particular one that is interested in productive, as opposed to unproductive, commercial ventures. The share of manufacturing production in the economies of ASEAN has been rising dramatically over the past few decades. Manufacturing now constitutes on average between 25 and 33 per cent of the gross domestic product in ASEAN's economies. They are no longer closed economies that are dependent on the export of primary raw materials. The tiger economies, unlike African, Latin American and Middle Eastern developing economies, are today open export-oriented manufacturing economies. So where have the rest of the developing nations of the South gone wrong? Why has ASEAN succeeded where others failed?

There are no readily available answers. Yes, there are many theories flying about. And perhaps the most important pointers stress political stability, high average savings rates and large investment in manpower, technical training and the education of women. Direct and indirect American investment in the region, which was designed to contain the spread of communism, also played an important part and must not be underestimated. The US not only pumped vast sums into non-communist South East Asia, it also transferred valuable technology to the region.

The war was lost in Vietnam, but American intervention in Vietnam did stem the tide of communism in South East Asia in the 1960s and '70s. While other regions of the Third World struggled to ensure their security by expanding their defence budgets and ruining their economies in the process, South

East Asia, with its reliance on the American security umbrella, was shielded from the worst effects of the terrible drain on resources that the arms build-up in other regions of the South entailed. Today, Vietnam is the seventh and latest addition to the ASEAN family.

South East Asia undeniably had a head start in development. Pragmatic is a word many in the West, and increasingly many more in the Third World, associate with "good governance". Strong and long-lasting is an expression frowned upon in the West. Pragmatism, a hallmark of ASEAN, is characteristically used as a euphemism for the practices of authoritarian regimes. South East Asian leaders are characteristically pragmatic. A case in point is Indonesia's strongman, President Suharto. After a quick trip to Europe recently for a thorough medical check-up, German cardiologists produced a clean bill of health and pronounced the septuagenarian fit to rule a nation of 200 million. He supervised Indonesia's transformation from one of the poorest Third World nations into a promising emerging market.

South East Asia has powerful, and authoritarian, leaders like Indonesia's Suharto and Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew, former premier and now senior minister, who have shunned the populist rhetoric of revolutionary Third World leaders such as Indonesia's first president, Ahmed Sukarno. The contrast between the policies of (former President) Sukarno and President Suharto in Indonesia is only the clearest example of a more general regional phenomenon. This is a phenomenon that was and will

remain a basic factor in the success of South East Asia countries." Professor S Jayakumar, the Singaporean minister of foreign affairs, noted at a lecture delivered at America's Georgetown University in April this year.

What sort of "phenomenon" did Jayakumar mean? Simply put, it is a question of social cohesion, political stability and economic viability. "South East Asian governments have been successful in creating a degree of social cohesion and political stability essential for economic development. This has reinforced development which in turn has reinforced social cohesion," Jayakumar noted.

The ASEAN experience is unique in many ways. ASEAN, along among the regional economic and political groupings of the Third World, is an organisation that functions well. ASEAN is taken seriously both by its member states and by outsiders. Indeed, as Jayakumar stated, ASEAN "is a way of calculating and defining national interest. The measure of regional cooperation in South East Asia cannot be merely the number of projects agreed and implemented. For each ASEAN member, the 'ASEAN factor' is a necessary and real element in the calculation of national interest. The weight of this intangible factor may have varied from issue to issue and over time. But it has never been entirely absent. ASEAN cooperation has not erased the old patterns of competition and conflict. But it has significantly controlled them and made them less dangerous and less relevant to day-to-day interactions."

Such a situation is yet to appear in Africa, South Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

### Small business loans in Borg El-Arab

WITH THE aim of encouraging investment and development, the Social Development Fund signed a contract with the Borg El-Arab Investor's Association to allocate LE24mn in loans for small investors within the city. Mohamed Farag Amer, head of the association, said the loans will be used to set up workshops and small factories that will operate as feeder industries.

In addition, seven per cent of these loans (approx LE1.2mn) will be earmarked for building a permanent headquarters of the association.

## MONEY & BUSINESS



### The first Egyptian-Palestinian advertising company

Ibrahim Nafie, chairman and editor-in-chief of Al-Ahram, Mohamed Rashid, President Arafat's economic advisor and Khaled Al-Useili signing the contract. Attending the signing were also Adel Affifi, general manager of advertising and member of the board of Al-Ahram



After signing the agreement, Ibrahim Nafie shakes hands with George Bantos. Next to him is Adel Affifi and Mustafa Al-Bortukali



PRESIDENT Yasser Arafat hailed the idea put forward by his advisors who suggested the establishment of the first Palestinian-Egyptian advertising company. Al-Ahram was chosen as the Egyptian partner. Ibrahim Nafie, chairman and editor-in-chief of Al-Ahram, representing the Egyptian side, signed the contract with Mohamed Al-Rashid, President Arafat's economic advisor or who represented the Palestinian Company for Commercial Services, which is a governmental company. Khaled Al-Useili, who represented the

By Ahmed Kamel Awad

Palestinian private sector, also signed the contract with Mustafa Al-Bortukali, Al-Ahram's legal advisor who attended the signing of the agreement. Also attending the signing were Adel Mohamed Affifi, general manager of the advertising department and member of the board of Al-Ahram, George Bantos, regional manager of Philip Morris and duty free shops in Palestine, Jordan and Egypt. George Bantos is also a

board member of the Palestinian Tobacco Corporation.

The project was studied carefully by all sides before signing the contract.

The new company, which will be based in Gaza, will undertake publishing, printing, marketing and distribution activities. The head office will be located in Ramallah. Other branches will be opened throughout Palestine.

The new company will also carry out advertising campaigns of major international companies in the Far East, Europe and the

United States. Cooperation will be forged with all advertising agencies worldwide to promote their activities in Gaza and the West Bank.

The Palestinian staff in the company will be trained at Al-Ahram. Al-Ahram's workshops in Qalyub will provide all the needs of companies and clients, capitalising on the potentials of the big studio of Al-Ahram/Pyramids Advertising Agency.

Al-Ahram will provide all its potentials and expertise to back up the forthcoming project.

### Trade fairs: an important tool for boosting exports

A DELEGATION from the Japanese Relief Organisation was received by Rushdi Saqr, head of the International Marketing and Fairs Organisation. Preliminary agreements have been made to study the possibility of Japanese grants being used to further enhance the fairgrounds at Nasr City with the construction of a conference hall and exhibition halls. Additionally, Egypt is expected to participate in a number of trade fairs due to take place in Japan during the forthcoming year.

Ahmed El-Goweli, minister of the economy and cooperation, was keen to point out the special role that the fairs organisation has to play in raising the level of Egyptian exports and thus realise substantial growth in the national economy. He expressed the need to encourage manufacturers to participate in trade fairs overseas.

Goweli also stressed the importance of maintaining a balance between imports and exports to African countries, saying that Egyptian exports to African countries must be increased.

**SUEZ CANAL AUTHORITY INVITATION TO GENERAL ADJUDICATION NO. 2/96**  
**SCA INVITES TENDERERS FOR A GENERAL ADJUDICATION FOR THE SUPPLY OF A SYSTEM FOR AUTOMATION OF TOLLS COLLECTION OF AHMED HAMDY TUNNEL.**  
**ALL COMPANIES SPECIALIZED IN THIS FIELD HAVE TO SUBMIT THE REQUIRED STUDIES AND THE TECHNICAL OFFER FOR THE PROPOSED SYSTEM TO THE SCA PROCUREMENT DEPT., PILOTAGE BUILDING, ISMAILIA AT 1200 HOURS, AUGUST 27, 1996.**  
**THE STUDIES HAVE TO COVER THE FOLLOWING:**  
**• REDUCING THE TIME NECESSARY FOR THE ENTRY AND EXIT.**  
**• ACHIEVING THE UTMOST RATES OF SAFETY DURING TRANSIT.**  
**• ENSURING FULL COLLECTION OF TOLLS.**  
**• SUPPLYING ALL ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT INCLUDING CAMERAS, BALANCES, CONTROL PANELS, CABLES ETC.**  
**• ALL CIVIL, ELECTRICAL AND MECHANICAL ERECTIONS NECESSARY FOR A TURN-KEY PROJECT.**  
**• HAVING AUTHORIZED MAINTENANCE CENTRES IN EGYPT FOR THE EQUIPMENT SUPPLIED, COMPANIES CAN PAY A VISIT TO THE TUNNEL SITE.**  
**THE COMPANIES WILL BE INFORMED ABOUT THE DUE DATE TO SUBMIT THE FINANCIAL OFFER AFTER FINISHING THE STUDY OF THE TECHNICAL OFFER.**

### To all expatriates coming back home

- Only few people know how to invest their money!
- Your vacation may be short that you can not find time to pay your due bills
- You may have to exchange or buy foreign currency at any time

#### We do it all on your behalf!

- Devoted consultations on the most lucrative investments
- Paying your telephone, fax, electricity bills and insurance premiums
- Sale and purchase of foreign currency at the best prices all days of the week at our branches countrywide and in most hotels and airports.

**Banque du Caire**  
 Your Reliable Consultant

### Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt Financial Statement MAY 1995/MAY 1996

RESULTS in L.E.	As of May 18, 1995	As of May 29, 1995	Growth rate
Total balance	6424	6226.5	3.2%
Deposits	5074.7	4933.3	2.9%
Investment balance	5825.1	5665.4	2.8%
Bank revenues	570.4	508	12.3%
Total revenues	367.7	349.8	5.1%
Net profits	287.2	245.9	16.8%
Shareholders profits	275.5	245.9	12%

The bank established and holds shares in 38 companies operating in various fields. The total capital of these companies amount to L.E. 1121 mn. of which the bank owns L.E. 196 mn.

MORE THAN 300 businessmen, investors, doctors and pharmacists attended a recent symposium on development at the invitation of Mohamed Raga El-Tahawi, governor of Assuit. Participating in the symposium were delegations from USAID, the Insurance Risk Guarantee Company, the Ministry of Economy and International Cooperation, and the Department of Commerce of the American Embassy. Besides industrial development, El-Tahawi expressed the desire to establish medical clinics, pharmacies and hospitals in the govern-

orate, which, while increasing the level of services would also serve as places of employment for graduates of medical, pharmacy and nursing schools.

In order to implement this strategy, the Insurance Risk Guarantee Company, said that the company would serve to guarantee loans for doctors and clinics. Banks would supply the loans, to establish and equip small clinics, which the company would guarantee an amount ranging from 65 to 80 per cent of the value of the loan.

A spokesman for USAID

shed light on an import programme for the private sector for which the agency would finance, and explained how investors and workers would benefit from such a programme. The spokesman explained that the programme would grant special loans, the minimum being \$10 thousand and the maximum \$15 million, under the auspices of 20 different banks. A spokesman for the commercial attaché at the American Embassy stated that further information on these and other programmes would be available from the Egyptian Investment Association.

It is noteworthy that the bank has — since the mid-'80s — embarked upon financing small-scale productive enterprises through soft loans. In October 1990, NBE allocated a tranche of LE25mn (which has increased to LE315mn in April 1996) to expand the scope of activities to cover 23,000 tradesmen, graduates and cooperatives.

As an active credit channel, NBE has effectively participated in the Social Fund for Development's (SFD) programme to encourage young graduates and small entrepreneurs.

In May 1993, the bank signed six contracts with the SFD amounting to LE250mn, to be channelled to such entrepreneurs at concessionary terms.

In April 1996, 13,000 customers benefited

from such loans (including 5,840 existing facilities and 7,163 new ones). Under the above-mentioned facilities, NBE contributed to creating job opportunities for young graduates through movable marketing outlets.

The bank has also concluded with the Ministry of Trade and the SFD, and LE40mn contract to be implemented in four successive stages. The contract provides for establishing 2,000 marketing and service projects creating 4,000 and 2,000 permanent and temporary job opportunities respectively. In fact, the bank has already financed 161 projects amounting to LE4mn, as of April 1996.

Furthermore, NBE has concerted in cooperation with the Ministry of Industry and the Federation of Industries a special system for small and medium-scale industries whose total cost ranges from LE500,000 to LE1mn each, including land and premises. The said system gives priority to labour-intensive industries and projects established in Upper Egypt.



## Close up

Salama A. Salama

## Softening up Netanyahu

Will the Arabs be required to tow the line of the new Israeli government, which insists on prioritising security over peace, or will the Likud government and its far-right coalition partners have to adjust their own position according to the dictates of peace agreements to which Israel is already committed? This is the question that lies at the heart of any discussion of the future of the region.

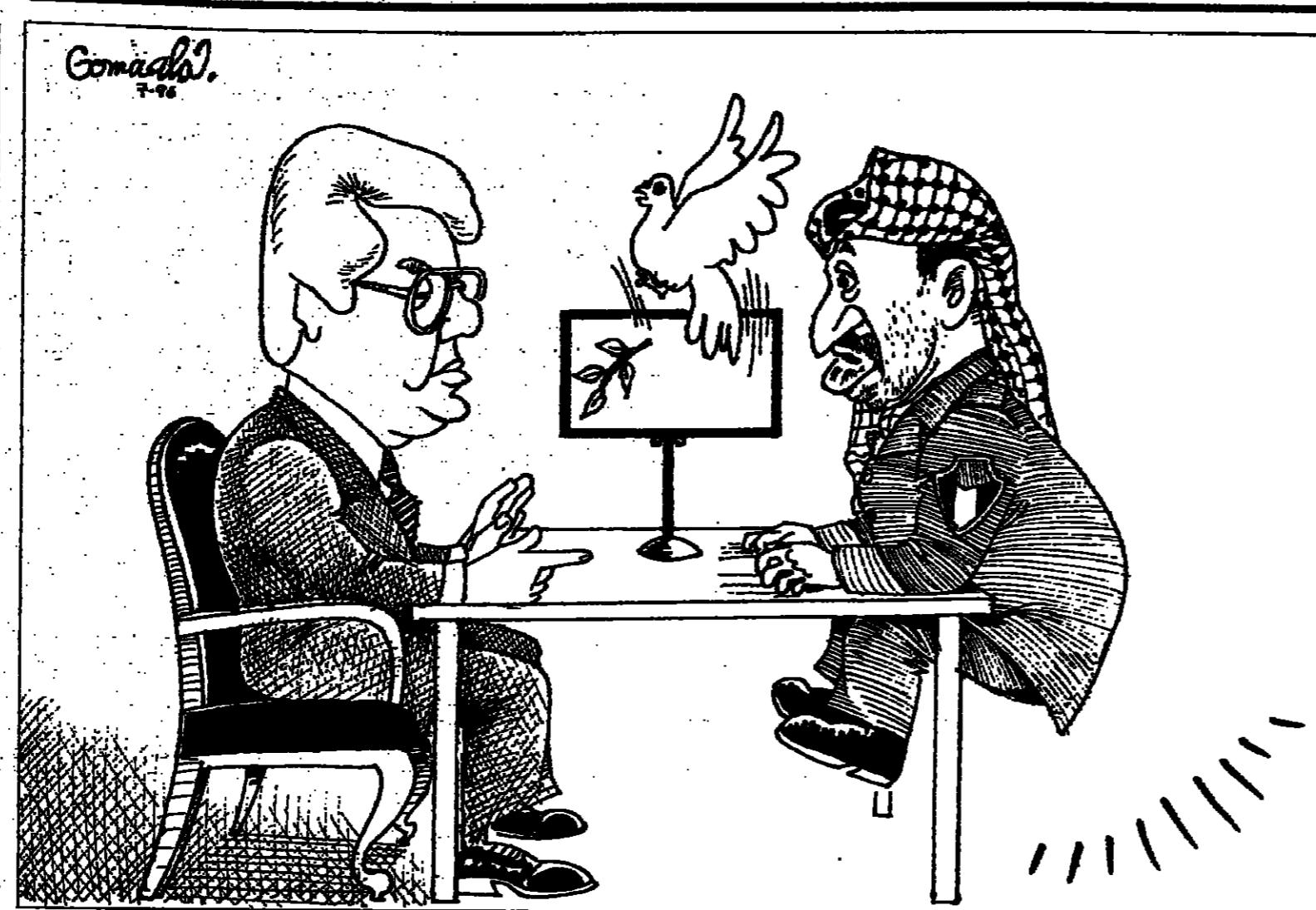
Clearly the US made a decision early that Netanyahu's new government needed time to familiarise itself with the situation and make the adjustments necessary to reconcile its domestic position with its international commitments. Certainly there was a hope that Netanyahu would show sufficient flexibility during his Washington visit to enable the peace process to carry on. The visit, though, served merely to harden Netanyahu's position and President Clinton's administration showed no signs of wishing to confront the new Israeli prime minister.

By now it should be obvious to all that President Clinton, even if re-elected, lacks the stomach for any public controversy with Israel, much preferring that any differences be dealt with behind the scenes. America has left it to the Arabs, and to Egypt in particular, to soften up Netanyahu and convince him of the importance of reviving the peace process by agreeing to implement articles already agreed upon. The US position appears to be based both on the assumption that the moderate Arab camp that made peace with Israel can win Netanyahu over to the peace process, and on the perfectly reasonable belief that the Arabs can no more make peace with only half of Israel than Israel could with half the Arabs.

And the Arabs, on their part, appear on the whole to have accepted the US position without much ado, if only because they remain, with presidential elections so close, there is little that they can expect from the US, in any case. They have no option, then, but to attempt to induce Israel with the political and economic benefits that will accrue through integration with the Middle East.

This may seem to represent a retreat in the Arab position. It certainly will be a reversal if it involves any back-peddling on positions jointly agreed at the recent Arab summit in Cairo or if Syria, Jordan and the Palestinians delay in patching up their various differences. And should Israel manage to play Arab parties one against the other in an attempt to engineer hasty normalisation with selected neighbours, then any Arab efforts to achieve a lasting peace will be tantamount to whistling in the wind.

What seems most needed at the moment is a concerted effort by the Arabs to convince America that its interests in the Arab world cannot be protected simply by security pacts and military alliances, nor by calls to fight terrorism. Its interests can only be guaranteed by establishing a just peace, which implies more active American participation in solving those issues that continue to stand in the way of the peace process. President Mubarak's visit to Washington next week could not have come at a more significant moment.



## Do the Arabs have a future?

The symptoms: severe depression. The cause: centuries of humiliation. The goal: complete revival. And the cure? Galal Amin diagnoses the ills of the Arab world and suggest ways to find a cure

The Arabs are a humiliated nation. Even before the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, they had been subjected to foreign occupation, political fragmentation, economic exploitation and cultural oppression. The process of humiliation accelerated after the establishment of Israel, but the pace grew even more rapid after the Israeli expansion of 1967, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in the 1980s, the signing by Egypt, the Palestinians and Jordan of humiliating peace treaties with Israel, and then the acceleration of economic agreements to the establishment of what is called a "Middle Eastern market" — for the benefit of Israel and at the expense of the Arabs. The most recent Israeli invasion of Lebanon last April, and the indiscriminate killing at Qana, condoned by the US government, of innocent civilians taking refuge at a UN camp, was only the most recent declaration of Arab powerlessness in the face of aggression by Israel and Western powers.

No nation has been so utterly humiliated while showing so little sign of resistance. Arab intellectuals, in the face of this humiliation, have taken two separate paths. There are those who decided to put on a brave face and pretend that what has been happening is not only inevitable but could also turn out to be to the Arabs' advantage. Members of this group prefer to treat what has been happening to the Arabs as part of a much wider international trend towards the greater supremacy of economic forces, the decline of ideology and the greater integration of all nations into the deepest-ever economic "melting pot". Israel is not a threat but a challenge; the goals of "national" independence and political sovereignty are outmoded and irrelevant since, in the new world that is being formed, no one is independent and no nation is, in any real sense, sovereign. There is no goal the Arabs could pursue more worthy than "rapid economic development" and improving their "competitive position"; there is nothing to which to aspire beyond a repetition of the South Korean miracle and the miracles of other tigers in south-east Asia.

The other camp is the group of "dreamers" who, sad and disappointed as they may be, have not yet lost hope, although they are at a loss to identify any solid ground for any hope at all. They keep referring to a period in the 1950s and '60s when the dream of Arab unity came very close to fulfilment, when the Arabs seemed able to dictate their will, to launch rapid economic development and industrialisation, build up a strong army and achieve a reasonable degree of social justice and when the people seemed to trust their political leadership. If this could happen in the not-so-distant past, why could it not happen again? But every day that passes sees this dream slipping further and further away from the domain of the possible, and with every new humiliation, this latter group of "dreamers" loses one after another of its members, not necessarily to the other group of "realists", but to sheer despair.

I must admit that I find it difficult to identify with either of these two positions. I find something basically "immoral" in the attitude of almost all those who advocate the former position, who seem to me to be trying to rationalise a position which is disloyal and defeatist merely because it provides them with personal safety and comfort. This position is naturally welcomed and supported by almost all Arab governments and powers external to the Arab world, including several institutions which extend financial aid to "research" in a great variety of fields linked to social sciences and the

humanities. It is a pity, it seems to this group, to sacrifice all this support in the name of a dream that does not have the slightest chance of fulfilment. Articles, papers and books are endlessly published, and conferences and symposia organised, with the sole message that the Arabs have no future except through full integration economically and culturally with Israel, as a "Middle East Market"; with the West, as a potentially "civilised" nation; and with consumer society, as good citizens of the "global village". Arab intellectuals in this group very, of course, in the degree of shamelessness with which they advocate these ideas, and some (though these are extremely rare specimens) hardly believe in them; but they are all helping to bring the Arabs to their dismal end.

What I find unacceptable is not this group's insistence that "the world is changing", that economic forces are rapidly replacing ideological and even national affiliations. This is very true, but there is no reason for the intellectual simply to bow to whatever seems to be the current trend. What remains of an intellectual if he/she bows to current trends, however powerful or inevitable these trends may seem to be? And if the intellectual happens to be Arab, what use could he/she be to his/her people if the only thing he/she seems capable of doing is to sing the praises of whatever happens to be the fashion of the day? Economic development may be a worthwhile cause, but this is not the answer to the question of whether the Arabs have a future. If the question meant "can the Arabs achieve rapid economic progress?", the answer would be: "of course they can". In this sense the Arabs do have a future, in the same way as any Third World country has a future, or the Russians have a future, even after the collapse of their empire. There is really nothing very difficult about raising rates of growth or balancing a government's budget or a country's external accounts. I am asking the question: "Do the Arabs have a future?", however, in a very different sense: can the Arabs develop their economies without reproducing the same ugly, crowded and polluted cities, the same consumer culture, the same... etc? Can the Arab develop their economies while at the same time preserving respect for their traditions, innovate a new kind of schools for their children without destroying their language and architecture? The former school of intellectuals contemptuously dismiss these questions as a waste of precious time, either on the grounds that there is really little in our culture that is worth preserving, or on the grounds that some loss of cultural identity is the inevitable price of economic progress. I reject both arguments, on the grounds that economic development is desirable only insofar as it allows a nation to express itself more fully or, as one wise anthropologist defined development, as "the increasing attainment of a society's own cultural values". To give these values away for the sake of economic progress is to throw out the baby with the bath water.

But to say this is not to go all the way with the other group of Arab intellectuals, many of whom appear to be clinging to certain ideas which are no longer tenable. One idea which should be quickly dispensed with is that any worldwide reform may be achieved within the present political framework. The truth is that no amount of "Arab summit", agreements or conferences which declare their aim to be finding a way out of the present Arab predicament could really be a step towards a solution. They are themselves symptoms of this predicament.

Secondly, it is important to realise that the present state of the Arabs is not the result of a relatively recent decline dating from the defeat of the Nasserist project of Arab unification and national rehabilitation. The short period of "Arab Awakening" of 1955-1967 should rather be seen as a brief interruption in a much larger process of decline. Mohamed Ali's ambitious project of economic and political revival in the early decades of the past century could be so regarded: another short-lived interruption of a long declining trend. And both Mohamed Ali and Nasser failed for the same reason: the Arabs had become too weak to stand up to the aggressive expansion of the West.

Thirdly, and at the cost of being more sinister, even brief Arab successes must be seen in the light of a changing international environment. Neither Mohamed Ali nor Nasser would have succeeded, even partially, had the international environment not been favourable at the time. Of course, each of these two great men had exceptional personal characteristics which helped to bring about those successes, but what made them even more "exceptional" was that they happened to rule at a time when no single superpower could alone dominate the world. When world domination by a single power became possible, the two men were suddenly cut down to size. It is important to admit that if one is to shed the illusion that these two glorious periods in Arab history (1820-40 and 1955-67) could be repeated simply by introducing some domestic reform or by a happy coincidence such as the birth of another inspired Arab leader. Alas, even these happy events, unlikely as they are, are not sufficient to bring about an Arab revival. The process of decline had already started with the first encounter with the modern West, almost exactly 200 years ago, and since then the spells during which this decline was arrested were inevitably short-lived and dependent mainly on external circumstances which allowed the Arabs no more than temporary relief. No real and secure revival could therefore be hoped for unless the original causes of the decline are squarely met.

When I say that Arab decline started two hundred years ago, I do not mean to deny that, even before the first encounter with the modern West, the Arabs had been showing symptoms of weakness. Political disintegration, economic and intellectual stagnation were the rule rather than the exception for at least the preceding three centuries, but in the absence of Western encroachment the opportunities for political, cultural and economic revival were always at hand. This is shown by the numerous movements for cultural and economic reform in various parts of the Arab and Muslim world during the late 18th and throughout the 19th century, movements which were dealt crushing blows by the invading West. The Wahhabis in Arabia, the Senoussi in Libya and the Mahdists in the Sudan are examples of strong movements for cultural and religious reform, in addition to the movements for political and economic reform of Mohamed Ali in Egypt, Emir Bashir in Lebanon and Daoud Pasha in Iraq. Before the Arabs came under Western domination, the Arabs were indeed stagnant for centuries, but there had always been a latent potential for emerging from this stagnation by purely domestic efforts. Since the beginning of Western dominance, every domestic effort at national revival has been severely crushed, to which was added, during the last 80 years, the disastrous encroachment of Zionism.

The repeated successes of the West, and later of Zionism, in subjugating the Arabs, and the corresponding repeated Arab failures to protect themselves, can of course be explained by superior military power and more advanced technology. But I am inclined to give precedence to psychological factors. Arab military, political and economic weaknesses are only symptoms of a psychological collapse, a complete loss of self-confidence, an astonishing readiness to find faults in oneself and to see one's own virtues as weaknesses and shortcomings. The sight of the Arab giant, with enormous economic and demographic resources at its disposal, and one of the richest cultural heritages, behaving like a mindless and powerless robot, being led about without the slightest trace of a will of its own, is indeed a very pitiful sight. But the solution cannot lie, as is often claimed, in more rapid economic development, or in more democracy, for what more "economic development" and more "democracy" actually mean today, for almost all of the Third World, is nothing other than more of the same humiliation and subjugation to external oppression. Nor is the solution to be found, or so it seems to me, in the widespread adoption of a new interpretation of Islam, so long as this new interpretation continues, like most current interpretations, to confuse national revival with personal salvation. To be sure, a psychological revival of the Arabs and a renewal of their self-confidence is almost inconceivable without a revival of religious faith, but it is conceivable that a "return to religion" could fail to bring about such a revival, and could in fact make things worse. For a revival of religious faith that excludes or even antagonises important minorities, or suppresses women, could only be disastrous, and a "return to religion" that emphasises private virtues at the expense of collective action may contribute nothing to the cause of national revival.

To say that Arab revival is conditional upon psychological rehabilitation rather than on economic or political reform, is of course to make the solution appear even more difficult. Like curing severe depression, it is much easier said than done. But fortunately, the task is made easier for a nation than for an individual by the fact that in the case of a nation, different generations are involved. The psychological malaise of one generation may not be passed on to the next, provided that enough effort is made to establish "psychological quarantine" for the protection of the young. This can be achieved only by a thorough revision of our system of "education", in the widest possible meaning of education, which includes culture, the media, and the way of bringing up children within the family. This again throws a heavy responsibility on our intellectuals, who alone are capable of surmounting the severe obstacles created by our politicians in cooperation with external powers. And of course it is not an easy task, not unlike lifting oneself up by one's own bootstraps. Short of an unforeseen stroke of exceptionally good luck, however, it seems to be the only way out, if indeed we are to have a future at all. It is also a very slow process, since the task here is not to build a factory or organise, for once, clean elections. It is no less than the task of rebuilding a mind. But if the malaise is really that deep, and the goal is no less than complete recovery, how could one expect this goal to be achieved within a few decades?

The writer is a professor of economics at the American University in Cairo.

## To The Editor

## Napoleonic dimensions

A progressively increasing number of letters to the editor have been lately expressing objection to the idea of bicentennial celebrations of the French expedition to Egypt. The objection is based on the military, as is quite nice to call it "imperialistic" dimension of the expedition. Proponents of this view, cite the violations and even the crimes committed by Napoleon's soldiers against Egyptians, but seem to forget or overlook the fact that sheer military might was — back in the 18th century — the criterion of progress.

Despite this, however, it was the presence of the French troops on Egyptian soil which raised the national spirit to recover from over 20 centuries of chamber and occupation, so much so that the French expedition came to mark the end of the Middle Ages in Egypt and the dawn of its modern history.

Why, therefore, do we ignore the non-military or rather scientific aspect of the French expedition? Specifically the scholars, the scientists, the artists, the doctors, etc.

It was the French expedition which introduced the practice of democracy in Egypt, as exemplified by the Shura council, surveyed and registered Egypt's monuments and recorded their value in the eyes of the world.

and deciphered the hieroglyphs, delved into their symbols and revealed their meanings.

The French introduced a printing press which Mohamed Ali later purchased to found the Amritya Printing Press. In fact, we could go on great lengths in enumerating the scientific societies established by Napoleon which are still contributing substantially to enrich Egyptian life.

Egypt itself became an imperialistic state under Mohamed Ali and Khedive Ismail. Its conquests extended to Lake Victoria and the sources of the Nile in the south, to the Arab Peninsula in the east and to Turkey and Greece in the north. We would no doubt lose much if we assessed the role of the French expedition in terms of an invading and occupying force rather than in terms of the consequences and results of the expedition in the various walks of life. To apply the same yardstick to other situations we would have to consider the Islamic conquest of Egypt in the context of an Arab invasion and occupation.

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Last year I commemorated the first centenary of the death of Khedive Ismail alone, by publishing a comprehensive work on the Khedive Post (*Al-Bosta Al-Khadiveya*). As a result, I was accused of being a royalist! I am, however, presently writing a comprehensive work about Nasser and will most probably celebrate alone the bicentennial of the French expedition with a book on Napoleon due to appear in 1998. I hope then that I will not be accused of being an agent of France!

Dr Magid Mohamed Farag  
President, Max Group  
Cairo

## The high road

Sir: Classy journalism is usually evidenced by the caliber of subject matter, information, and analysis which are all delivered by a wise, a distinct and refined linguistic style. Real professional journalists strive to inform and stimulate their readers with regard to issues and concerns.

I was quite disheartened recently by the campaign in the national and opposition newspapers to bash Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister of Israel, before and during his first visit to Egypt.

In my opinion, the bashing went beyond

the limits of good taste and fair criticism. The bashing included insults and derogatory use of adjectives derived from the prime minister's name in Arabic.

To be sure, there are valid reasons to be inate with the prime minister, but our displeasure with the man should be confined to the realm of objective and rational criticism of policies and positions.

Insults and snide cartoons cannot bear much consequence on Netanyahu's position. The end result is that our image will suffer and our emotional immaturity will be confirmed. In this regard, I applaud the Weekly for taking the high road as a standard policy.

Dr Fayed Shabani  
Alexandria

## Crimes against man

Sir: The international community has been pressing Radovan Karadzic to hand himself in to the UN War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague to be tried for crimes against humanity. He is accused of a number of crimes during the war in Bosnia including destroying religious sites; raping and torturing thousands of people; mutilating, slandering, and executing hundreds of women and men and burying them alive in mass graves; killing

hundreds of innocent children and using hostages as human shields to avert NATO air strikes.

After all these savage and brutal crimes against humanity, I ask the international community what kind of penalty would be appropriate?

Shazly Asmati Bahr  
Aswan

## Tobruk holiday

Sir: I am writing to convey my appreciation of the Libyan Mediterranean resort of Tobruk, where my wife and I stayed recently.

We were charged a modest \$45 a night for our large room in a comfortable hotel not three blocks from the sea. The room was of equal or higher standard than many so-called de luxe suites that are booked at several times that rate in Cairo's exclusive five-star hotels.

The standard of service afforded by every member of the staff was of such a high caliber that any one of them could have been the actual owner. I would also recommend the excellent seafood on offer in the hotel's speciality and welcoming restaurant.

More people should visit Libya and its wonderfully inviting northern coastline. The struggle for a tourist visa is worth the hassle.

Gianluigi Toscanini  
Gardone City

## Soapbox

## Netanyahu left stranded

When David Levi, Israel's minister of foreign affairs and deputy prime minister, threatened to resign his appointment if Israel's newly elected prime minister did not include Ariel Sharon in his cabinet he inadvertently exposed the fragile base of Benjamin Netanyahu's government. The Labour Party, after all, won the largest block of seats in the Knesset, the reason why Netanyahu was forced to stitch together a coalition including five other parties.

The result is that every time Netanyahu backs down from commitments made during the elections and upon forming his cabinet he faces the prospect of one or more ministers withdrawing, threatening his Knesset majority. In which case his options are few — to form a new cabinet, to dissolve parliament, or invite the Labour Party to participate in a national unity government.

Netanyahu came to power with the support of a broad array of individuals, parties and groups with divergent interests. They are bound by neither a single platform nor a shared concept of unity. Indeed, all they have in common is extremism and if Netanyahu does not placate that, they will withdraw support. Given the fragility of this situation, the most likely eventual scenario is the formation of a predominantly secular national unity government, with the religious parties in opposition. The political arena in Israel will be split into a secular axis, based in Tel Aviv but including kibbutz members and most of the army, and a religious axis, based in Jerusalem and drawing its support from religious fundamentalists and their extremist leaders.

While there is no essential difference between Labour and Likud when it comes to the secular ideology of Zionism, the traditional secular parties have found themselves retreating before resurgent religious parties. Which leaves Netanyahu dependent upon a religious constituency to which he, though an extremist, does not belong.

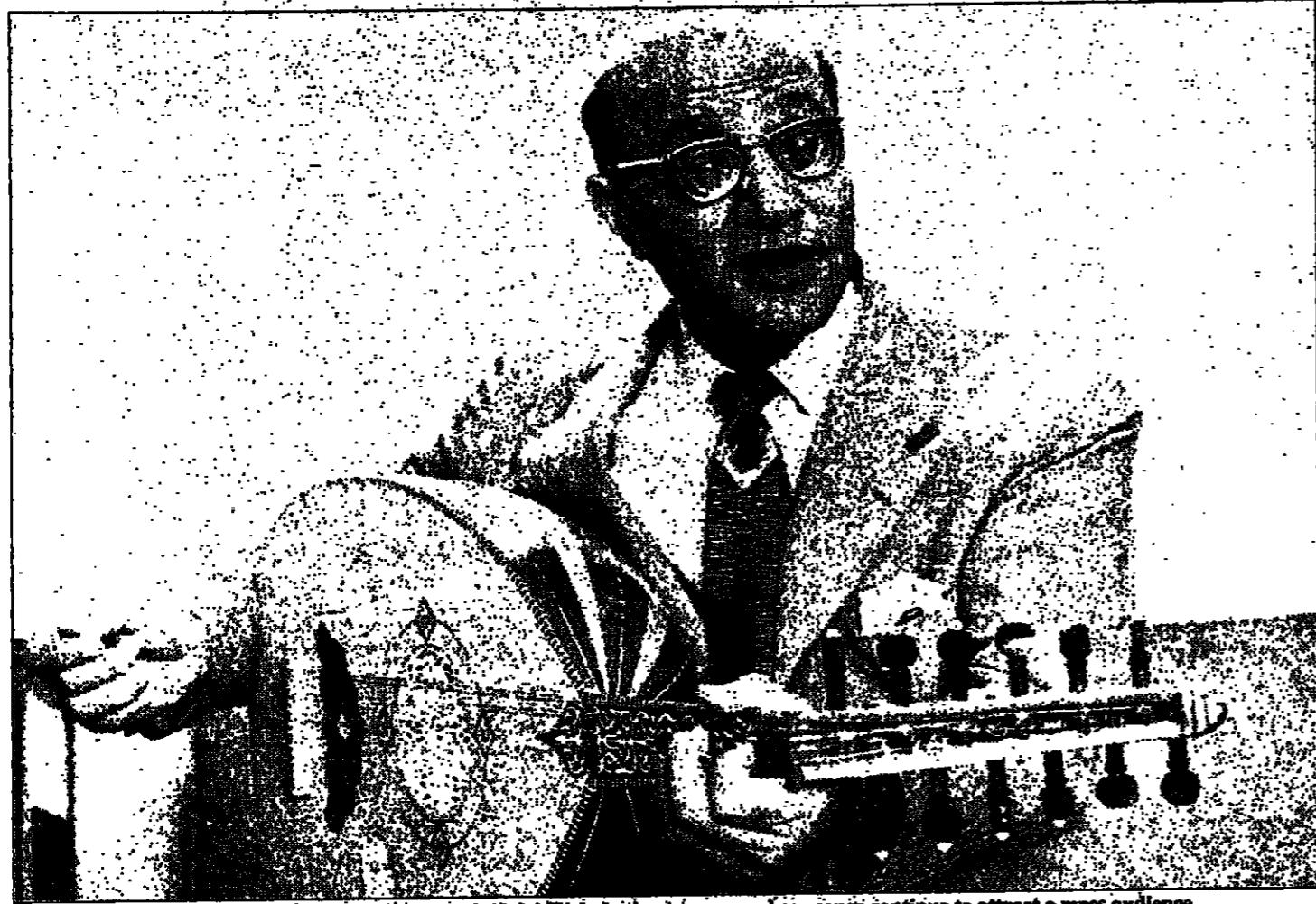


This week's Soapbox speaker is a columnist specialised in Palestinian affairs with the opposition Al-Sha'ab.

Mahgoub Omar

# A certain perfume

Foolish things remind David Blake of nothing more than me versus you versus me



A summer remembrance of sounds past: Mohamed Abdel-Wahab, the composer, whose songs continue to attract a mass audience

*Arabic takht: Open Air Theatre; Cairo Opera House; 18 July*

Where do song birds go in the winter time? If they are good they go to the opera houses of Euro-America. In summer time, if they are famous, dead and Egyptian they leave their perches in paradise and fly home to Cairo. Egypt is a land of conventions, the latest being a return flight to the Cairo Opera House's open air Arabic *takht*. The venue is large enough, picturesque and cool even on the most humid mid-summer night. So the great gaudy ghosts come in on the summer air to do their annual job of haunting, regular as Banquo.

Only the highest are chosen — Abdel-Halim Hafez, Mohamed Abdel-Wahab, Umm Kalthoum, and among the living, Warda. First among the ghosts, of course, is Umm Kalthoum. But dead or alive, they have forged a tradition of their own beyond the vagaries of fashion. They are icons whose sheer never dims.

Interesting to wonder when and how this tradition of singing came about. Did Umm Kalthoum's forerunners, before the age of the disc or the tape, sing as she sang? Did the tradition which produced them begin long ago? What did singers sing in *le grand Caire* of the 18th century?

There were always voices, of course, even in very ancient Egypt. Umm Kalthoum's technique and vocal personality sprang from old roots, religious and secular. But the form that enabled her to flower in a dynamically changed 20th century had very firm traditions.

These popular singers represent in many ways, an ancient sound revived up to cope with the new, the odd and the dramatic outpourings of our times. One thing they all have in common is the strange feature of placing all accent on the word *Prima la parde* — something that took Europe centuries to learn.

The singers represented in performances by today's young artists were, and are — in Warda's case — first masters of the word and then of the art of wrapping it around the note. Every syllable of the august originals are

heard, even by strangers to the Arabic language.

What of the songs themselves, and the sacred monsters who sang them? After a short lead in by the very good orchestra, every one of whom seemed to be a virtuoso, Hamdi Hashem sang two songs by Abdel-Wahab and one by Mohamed Fawzi. The set began with one of those exciting, long held *ostinato* notes used to introduce a solo performer. It is as dramatic an entrance as having to showily descend a steep staircase as used to be done in the old European music halls.

And so the star — for Hamdi Hashem seems one. He has a large, kindly voice, neither a fashionable boy whisper nor a heavy ho, muscular Rambo tone. He knows what he is doing and uses a lot of technique in this three-songs-in-one presentation, displaying trills, shakes and the kind of long Oriental runs found in Mozart, who of course had heard Oriental music. A fine opening.

Then came a lady in black. There is always one, one lady, one black dress. Why always black? Her set consisted of two Umm Kalthoum songs. Would the empress of the Orient have been furious if she had worn a striking number in red? Anyway, this singer, Fatma El-Gansary, looked handsome and sang with presence. She was careful to make all her words clear — the large audience expected this and knew by heart all the songs performed at this concert.

The songs have, after all, become folklores from a time twice removed from this. The folk and the lore of that time are still alive which naturally begs a question — where are the folk of now? Maybe it is not so easy to represent the musical inferior of 1996.

Then another man came to sing other songs. Atef Abdel-Hamid had a soft grained but very expressive voice. He was the poet, the lover of yesterday's romance. He sang two of the finest songs of the night, one created for Abdel-Halim Hafez, tears and joys of yesterday made palpable, powerful and haunting by the quizzical sweet and sour Abdel-Halim, the Hamlet of Egyptian song. A hard act to follow, though Abdel-Hamid had a good try.

**Theatre**

**The riddle of the skirt**

**Nehad Selaiha** watches as a young director wrestles with Harold Pinter's *Old Times* at Al-Hanager

Anna's) he had looked up at a certain party 20 years before, all his troubles, and ours, would be over.

Deeley's pathetic attempt to break into the relationship between the two old friends and claim for himself a foothold in their past takes the shape of a story, somewhat crass and vulgar, but very funny, which is supposed to prove that he knew his wife's friend in the past. Once, at "someone's flat, somewhere in Westbourne Grove," he says, "you sat on a very low sofa, I sat opposite and looked up your skirt. Anna denies the story and we believe her, but then, towards the end, she mentions in passing that she once "borrowed" some of Kate's underwear to go to a party without telling her and only confessed to her later, telling her that she had been punished for her naughtiness because some man spent the whole evening looking up her skirt. Was that man Deeley? Was it her skirt he had looked up at Kate's underwear? Or was it Kate's skirt?

At the climax of the battle over Kate, Deeley repeats the same story about the party, this time in Kate's presence; then, suddenly, he is not sure: "She thought she was you" he says,

back than the '60s; so instead of the '50s tunes, we had the Beatles, and rather than *Odd Man Out*, the film that brings Deeley and Kate (or was it Anna) together and figures prominently in Deeley's recollections, we have Jean-Luc Godard's *Vivre Sa Vie*. The "flea-bit" of a cinema Godard remembers is recreated by means of a screen on which shots of the film are projected. In the second half (the two acts of the play are played straight through with no interval), these are replaced with footage of Anna (Sherine El-Ansari) and Kate (Manal Youssef) dressed in each other's clothes and conversing happily on a bed, and of Deeley (Khaled El-Sawi) walking in repeatedly through the big French window, which frames the stage at the back. Through the window, on a pale backdrop, the lighting (designed by Christoph) reflected the moods of the characters in telling shades.

The three young actors did a very good job with a very difficult and tricky text — made all the more trickier by the director's insistence on playing up the lesbian potential of the relationship between the two old flatmates. Khaled El-Sawi, in particular, who, like Pinter, is both an actor and a playwright, gave a memorable virtuoso performance, and the audience who flock nightly to Al-Hanager adored every minute of it.

Then came Sahar Nagui, in black and silver. She has a strong, vibrant voice that actually gets close, in climactic moments, to the daunting original Umm Kalthoum, with whom she opened her set of four songs. The next two were by Abdel-Wahab, while the fourth, a song performed most famously by Warda, closed the concert. The range demanded for the Kalthoum and Warda songs taxed this soprano. She was full out and sounded uncomfortable, but the heart of the song was there.

Interesting concert, fine interpreters and splendid instrumental soloists. Past and present, the voices are here and around but where is the spirit of the zeitgeist of the late 1990s? Not so easy to be a songbird from hell.

*Trio Jazz: Ahmed Rabie, with Rashad Fahim, keyboard. Ahmed Raghib, bass guitar; Open Air Theatre; Cairo Opera House, 21 July*

Drums! Not a missummer night's dream. Not drums, not again.

But as this concert began drums it was. Drums are not everyone's musical meat, not mine at least. But the large audience appeared well-conditioned to the bangs. Drums used to be for battle, till the bomb took over. Now they don't even bury kings to their sound. The medium has taken over that particular role.

But when we heard the thunder of hoots that creates that fomie feeling, underpinned by the sound of the Ahmed Rabie jazz trio, it was an experience to be enjoyed. This trio has a strong, imperative sound, with no soft edges. There is no little drummer boy for Rabie, nor drum majorette in stretch nylon body sack with gold braid and top hat. We are for once fairly deep in the dark and dotty nineties and it impresses. Though the summer juice is running very thin musically these two concerts, of the 18 and 21 July, kept the flagging, heat battered spirit up and going.

A drum is now more than a drum for Ahmed Rabie. Anything you hit to produce a noise is a drum for him. He doesn't bang drums but bangs discs.

A fizzy, fire cracker display emerges from the material, and it gets better as it progresses. You can take your mind off the song but the mechanics stay with you. Then authentic drum thunder.

But this is Cairo not Las Vegas. The sound of the band may have extinguished the stars above but the Sherman tower still stands. Then on again, things have changed, quieter, more rhythm, less hassle. We move into a definable major key. It is beginning to dance. Dance little gentleman — there are hardly any ladies present — but dance alone.

The sound changes again, and then becomes almost a commentary. The trip we have made has a catch. In the head on confrontation of now it is me, not you no togetherness is visible. Even the family unit is under threat. From what and how is the business of sociologists and politicians. Music merely makes its observations, a watcher in the centre of the silver jungle.

And then jazz proper. The bow tie is tied at last and there is that certain perfume around.

## Listings

### EXHIBITIONS

**Ibrahim Abdel-Ghafar**  
*Atelier du Caire, El-Ramly Siddiqi  
Hall, 2 Karim El-Dawla St, Downtown, Tel  
574 3544. Daily exc Fri, 10am-8pm.*

**Osama Fawzi's** debut film depicts the lives of a number of microbus drivers, performed by Mahmoud Hemeida, Abdalla Mahmoud and Hassan Hosni.

**Aha El-Sherif (Sculptures) & Ali  
El-Salabi (Sculptures)**  
*Atelier du Caire, El-Nagym Hall, 2  
Karim El-Dawla St, Downtown, Tel  
574 3544. Daily exc Fri, 10am-8pm.*

**Group Show**  
*Mashrabiyah Gallery, 8 Champs-  
Elysees St, Downtown, Tel 578 4494. Daily  
exc Fri, 10am-8pm.*

**George Selim (Paintings)**  
*Galleria Salama, 36/2 Ahmed Orabi  
St, Mohandessin, Tel 346 3242. Daily  
exc Fri, 10am-2:30pm & 5pm-8pm.  
Until 31 July.*

**Mohamed Shaker (Paintings) &  
Tarek Zabidi (Sculptures)**  
*Expo Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St,  
Zamalek, Tel 340 6293. Daily exc  
Sun, 10:30am-5pm & 5pm-8pm.  
Until 27 July.*

**Group Show (Paintings & Sculptures)**  
*Espace Gallery, 1 El-Shorafa St, Garden  
City, Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri &  
Sat, 9am-1pm. Until 5 Aug.*

**Ighiyal (Assassination)**  
*Space Gallery, 50, Mohandessin,  
Tel 346 4017. Daily 10am-8pm.*

**Fair Game**  
*Foundation for Hellenic Culture, 6  
Asha El-Taymouriya St, Garden  
City, Tel 355 1741. Daily exc Sat &  
Sun, 10am-5pm.*

**Hellenic Library**  
*Foundation for Hellenic Culture, 6  
Asha El-Taymouriya St, Garden  
City, Tel 355 1741. Daily exc Sat &  
Sun, 10am-5pm.*

**The Museum of Mr and Mrs  
Mahmoud Khalil**  
*1 Kufour El-Ahly St, Dokki, Tel  
336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.*

**Egypt's largest collection of  
nineteenth century European art,  
amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil,  
including works by Courbet, Van Gogh,  
Gauguin, Monet and Rodin.**

**Egyptian Museum**  
*Tahrir St, Downtown, Tel 575 1210. Daily  
exc Fri, 9am-11:30am & 1pm-3pm.*

**Outstanding collection of  
Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures and the  
controversial mummies' room.**

**Coptic Museum**  
*Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bah El-Khalqa,  
Tel 391 992/3/590 1520. Daily  
exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri, 9am-11:30am &  
2pm-5pm.*

**A vast collection of  
Islamic arts and crafts including  
mashrabiyah, furniture, ceramics,  
textiles, woodwork and  
decorative arts from  
Egypt's Fustat, Ayyubid and  
Mameluke periods and other countries  
in the Islamic world.**

**Islamic Museum**  
*Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bah El-Khalqa,  
Tel 391 992/3/590 1520. Daily  
exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri, 9am-11:30am &  
2pm-5pm.*

**A permanent display of  
paintings and sculpture charting the modern  
art movement in Egypt from its earliest  
pioneers to latest practitioners.**

**Coptic Museum**  
*Port Said St, Bah El-Khalqa, Tel 391 992/3/590 1520. Daily  
exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri, 9am-11:30am &  
2pm-5pm.*

**A permanent collection of  
works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d.  
1934), whose granite monument to  
Said Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil  
Bridge.**

**The Quest**  
*Cosmos II, 12 Emadoddin St, Downtown, Tel  
578 0681. Daily exc Mon, 1pm-5pm.*

**A permanent display of paintings  
and sculpture charting the modern  
art movement in Egypt from its earliest  
pioneers to latest practitioners.**

**Mohamed Nagui Museum**  
*9 Mahrous St, Giza, Tel 385 8558. Daily  
10am-1pm, 3pm-6pm & 9pm.*

**A museum devoted to the paintings of  
Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).**

**Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum**  
*Tahrir St, Gezira, Daily exc Sun & Mon, 9am-1:30pm.*

**A permanent collection of works by  
the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d.  
1934), whose granite monument to  
Said Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil  
Bridge.**

**Virtuosity**  
*Metro, 353 Talaat Harb St, Downtown, Tel  
578 0681. Daily 10am-1pm, 3pm-6pm &  
9pm.*

**A permanent collection of  
serial killer Leila Elouf's**

**Leila Elouf is the beauty and  
one else as the ugliest. Directed by  
Hussein Kamal.**

**Old Times**  
*El-Hanager Theatre, Cairo Opera House  
grounds, Tel 340 6661. Until 28 July.  
Harold Pinter's play, directed by  
Mohamed Abu Saad, extended for a  
week. See review opposite.*

**Pharaonic Paintings**  
*El-Ghad Theatre, 12 Shagaret El-Darr St, Zamalek, Tel 352 0660. Daily  
exc Wed, 10pm.*

**Leila Elouf is the beauty and  
one else as the ugliest. Directed by  
Hussein Kamal.**

**Waiting To Exhale**  
*El-Hanager Theatre, Tel 340 6661. Until 28 July.  
Harold Pinter's play, directed by  
Mohamed Abu Saad, extended for a  
week. See review opposite.*

**Commercial cinemas change their  
programmes every Monday. The information  
provided is valid through to Sunday, after which it is wise to check with the cinemas.**

**Mit Feli**  
*Al-Hanager Theatre, Tel 340 6661. Until 28 July.  
Harold Pinter's play, directed by  
Mohamed Abu Saad, extended for a  
week. See review opposite.*

**Judge Dredd**  
*Tahrir St, Dokki, Tel 335 4726. Thurs & Sat midnight.  
With Sylvester Stallone.*

**Toy Story**  
*Al-Hanager Theatre, Tel 340 6661. Until 28 July.  
Harold Pinter's play, directed by  
Mohamed Abu Saad, extended for a  
week. See review opposite.*

**Reviewed by Nagwa El-Ashraf**

**Compiled by Injy El-Kashaf**

**BATIKS, carpets and drawings by Soheir Osman are on show at the Opera House Gallery. These draw on Islamic and Pharaonic art for their inspiration.**

**Salama Gallery** exhibits paintings, bas reliefs, mosaics and engravings on brass by George Sebili.

**Maintaining the habit of hosting two artists**

**currently, space at Extra Gallery is given over**

**to sculptures by Tarek Zabidi and paintings by**

**Mohamed Shaker. Zabidi's sculptures, in**

**wood, bronze and marble, range from the**

**abstract to the figurative while Shaker's paintings,**

**which make use of various materials like rope,**

**shells and pebbles, speak of Alexandria.**

**Alaa Sherif's sculptures in wood, residually**

**figurative and abstract by turns, are on show at the**

**Atelier du Caire, as are 15 paintings, variations**

# 'A sublime view'

**Nigel Ryan** explores the trajectory of David Roberts, from Scottish slum to Royal Academy, taking in, of course, the Orient

The problem with David Roberts is that he is everywhere. He travelled widely, throughout the Middle East, crossing Syria, Palestine, and of course Egypt, producing endless sketches, some to be worked up into full blown paintings on his return to England, others to be forwarded to Louis Haghe, the Belgian plate maker whose name appears alongside that of Roberts on a large number of his Middle Eastern lithographs.

But though Roberts' fame rests largely on the product of his journeys in the region, he had in fact travelled widely before ever setting foot east of the Mediterranean. He produced views of France, Germany and the Netherlands, finished a series of engravings, *Prints of the Nile*, commissioned by Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, and on the advice of David Wilkie, Roberts' friend and a leading portraitist of his day, travelled extensively in Spain, endlessly sketching. For two years he toured the peninsula, drawing ruins and monuments, paying equal attention to the Moorish architecture of Andalusia and the excesses of late Spanish Gothic. This journey was to result in the publication, in 1837, of *Picturesque Views of Spain* which, though by no means a cheap volume, still managed, in just two months, to sell some 1,200 copies. It should have provided Roberts with a considerable income had it not been for the artist's rather naive trust in his publisher.

Wilkie's advice to visit Spain had been informed by the knowledge that, to the armchair traveller at home, it remained an unexplored destination in the first half of the 19th century. It was sufficiently exotic — Catholic, for which read, as a 19th century Anglican would, blood and gore, martyrdoms and hagiographies — to excite a transient interest in the drawing rooms and libraries of England, an interest that translated into high sales figures and which, combined with a taste for the picturesque, could turn representations of far flung lands into a very lucrative business.

Roberts was born in Stockbridge, Edinburgh, in 1796. Stockbridge, now a well-heeled section of the Scottish capital, full of Victorian mansions, cottages converted by the professional middle-classes, was at the beginning of the 19th century on the outskirts of the city, a far from salubrious address. It was more or less a slum, an unlikely place for a Royal Academician to be born. Yet by 1838 Roberts had achieved sufficient success to be elected an associate of the Royal Academy and had negotiated the notoriously difficult route between the slums and Burlington House. It was a passage as arduous as any of his foreign excursions, and which took in, en route, a successful career as a set designer.

The journey began, though, with a seven year apprenticeship with one Gavin Buego, a decorator of some local repute. By 1815 he had moved to Perth, taking up his first paid work as a decorator before returning to Edinburgh, where he started designing sets for the Pantheon, a second-rate theatre which at one point asked its decorator to create the cityscape of Baghdad for a production of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. By 1819 he was steadily moving up the ladder, first being appointed designer at the Theatre Royal, Glasgow, and then at the Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh. By the beginning of the 1820s his reputation as a set designer had grown to the extent that he was commissioned first by the Drury Lane Theatre, and later by Covent Garden.

At the same time he was also developing a reputation as a painter, producing picturesque views for a seemingly insatiable market. He worked solidly and competently, lucratively miming a taste for Romanticism's soft underbelly and producing the kind of genre paintings that, if they would not necessarily be approved by Ruskin, nonetheless approximated to the pantomime principles mid-Victorian's art critic high priest was to espouse in *Modern Painters*.

As a painter Roberts' breakthrough came with the exhibition of "A View of the Cathedral at Rouen" at the Royal Academy, as stagey a picture as one could hope. He became the subject of critical praise, an item in newspaper columns, and began to receive commissions. Indeed, on his European journeys he would spend most of his time on thumb nail sketches which, upon his return to England would be shown to potential patrons — among whose number Queen Victoria was eventually to be included — who would select the view they liked best, later to be worked up in to a full scale painting by the artist.

Such a process, allowing ample opportunity for the kind of atmospheric effects demanded by his audience was not, on the whole, likely to promote any great veracity, either architectural or topographic. Yet it was atmosphere, in the end, after which Roberts strived, because it was atmosphere that sold.

And in this endeavour it is surely not too controversial a suggestion that his training and experience in the theatre was to prove immensely helpful.

It was, perhaps, the success of his Spanish venture and the resulting volume that encouraged Roberts to consider a similar project. But where to? Germany, birthplace of European Romanticism, had been done to death.

Everyone and anyone had done the same, all precipitous cliffs, lonesome pines and tors. He needed some other destination, one with a general appeal. And then he hit on a brainwave. With the money he had made out of the Spanish book he decided to go to the Middle East, journeying to the land of the Bible, recording both biblical sites and the vast archaeological complexes, such as Petra, that were causing such excitement in Europe.

On 26 August 1838 Roberts set off for Paris. By the 11 September he was in Marseilles, where he booked passage on a steamer heading for Civitavecchia. He then travelled via Malta, crossing the southern Aegean, and



Above, Roberts in a costume drama of his own making, portrayed in 1840 by Robert Scott Lauder in Oriental dress and top left, Roberts as he appeared in the first edition of *The Holy Land*

by the end of the month had arrived in Alexandria. From there he travelled as far south as Abu Simbel, making much of the journey on a *dakhiya*, which he had hired only with the greatest difficulty. By Christmas time Roberts was in Cairo, where he was to make more than a hundred sketches, before, in February of the following year (1839), setting off for Sinai. Upon reaching Gaza, he decided to head towards Jerusalem, and from there explored the valley of the Jordan. Heading north again, Roberts finally reached Baalbec, where he fell seriously ill, intending initially to travel as far as Palmyra, the fever he had contracted forced him to curtail his plans, and so he journeyed to Beirut from where, on the 13 May, 1839, he was able to book passage on a ship heading for England.

The problem he faced, upon his return, was to sell his work. He approached a great many publishers, none of whom showed a great deal of interest until Francis Graham Moon finally offered the artist the sum of 3,000 pounds for exclusive rights to publish the works, as well as contracting Roberts to supervise the etching, a task that would be undertaken by the young Belgian engraver Louis Haghe.

The result was the phenomenally successful three volume edition, *The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea, Egypt, Nubia*, which appeared between 1842 and 1849. And Roberts' fate was sealed. His visions became, for

19th century England, the representation of the Holy Land. And thus a thousand book covers, calendars, gold framed reproductions and greetings cards were launched, together with a tradition that reached its culmination in the career of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, biblical illustrator par excellence.

The omnipresence of Roberts is a difficult phenomena to explain. He went everywhere and he is everywhere. He hangs in Cairo restaurants, on the sitting room walls of the city's residents. He is sold in every gift shop, in bazaars and five star hotels. In Egypt original lithographs, two color prints which were then completed by hand, a laborious and time consuming process, change hands for more than they do in London. Medium sized bookshops in provincial English towns all carry copies of one of the many modern editions of the work. But what lies behind this success?

Certainly contemporaries of Roberts, those who bought Moon's volumes as they appeared, thought that they were buying a window onto a region that they had

what they wanted. As a consequence he was to take quite remarkable liberties with both topography and landscape. And it is this, perhaps, that explains why so many of his landscapes might just as well be entitled "A view of the Rhine" were it not for the exotically clad figures in the foreground.

*Yesterday and Today: The Holy Land*, a massive and copiously illustrated volume, the first of two, published by AUC Press, provides a useful reference by juxtaposing Roberts' views with recent photographs of the same sites. In the introduction Fabio Bourbon concludes, somewhat disingenuously, thus:

"A bridge spanning the distance between past and present is offered by the splendid photographs taken by Antonio Attini, a young photo-journalist who retraced the voyage of David Roberts, taking photographs that correspond with the lithographs. This unusual mingling of such radically different pictures is particularly informative about the inexorable results of the passage of

photo-journalist, who once again seeks to represent "one of the most appealing and perhaps mysterious regions of the world" by giving yet another eyewitness account, this time mediated through the lens of a camera. Yet what emerges through these juxtapositions of images, lithograph supplemented by photograph, is less an appreciation of the attrition of time — in a century and a half, even taking contemporary levels of environmental degradation into account, it is difficult to imagine so many mountains being reduced to heaps of rubble — than an acknowledgment of Roberts' desire for dramatic effect at the expense of topographic accuracy. We are back in the theatre, back to staging, to all those tricks of back-drop perspective.

On the 20 February 1839 David Roberts notes in his journal:

"Today we ascended to the summit of Sinai, which took us two hours... The view from the top is the most sublime that can be imagined."

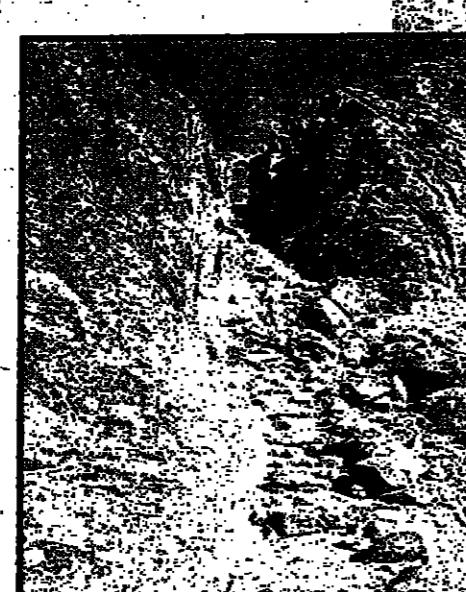
But the panorama that Roberts creates is very much his own. Compare Attini's photograph of *The Ascent to the Summit of Sinai* with Roberts' print of the same. There is no question, having ascended the steps in Roberts' print, that the view could be anything other than sublime. Hardly surprising that this particular image, like a great many other of Roberts' prints, has made its way onto the cover of a book, in this instance *The Longest Journey*. Jennifer Potter's fictional account of the travels in Yemen of an intrepid Edwardian English gentleman who ends up, finally, incarcerated by wicked Turks.

While one should not be taken in by the discredited maxim that the camera never lies — the lens distorts the actual experience of any landscape as much as the brush — Attini's representation of the scene is a far closer approximation to reality than Roberts. The latter's perpendicular cliffs did not erode in a century, they simply were not there in the first place. Roberts created them for his audience, because this is how Mount Sinai should look and they bought the book because it did not fail their expectations. Without the four figures in the foreground, dressed straight out of the costume cupboard, it might as well be the approach to one of those Rhine land extravaganzas that travel brochures invariable refer to as "fairy-tale castles".

The volume *Yesterday and Today: The Holy Land*, covers Roberts' journeys through Sinai, Palestine and Syria. The planned second volume, which will cover his trip up the Nile Valley, and hence include much of the tourist bazaar stuff, as well as his work in Cairo, is planned for later in the year. The editors, while being a little slipshod with the text, have taken great pains to chronologically reorder the prints, changing the sequence of Moon's first edition. In doing so they have occasionally been forced to disregard the dating incorporated in the finished lithograph, which was in any case often provided by Haghe, in favour of the evidence supplied from Roberts' own journal. Such a pernickety approach to the ordering of the images is perhaps a little fastidious in a volume that purports, in its publicity material, to be "a lavishly illustrated gift book". But every publishing venture these days has to have its hanger, one more case of *plus ça change*...

Roberts died at the age of 68 in 1864, a distinguished artist, accorded a great many honours both at home and abroad. A pity he did not last longer, for three years later Verdi was commissioned to write his Egyptian opera, *Aida*. The reasons why Roberts would have been the ideal designer for the production lie less in his early experience in the theatre but in the lithographs of Pharaonic ruins that will comprise the bulk of AUC Press's second volume devoted to the ubiquitous David Roberts, R.A. Given the Khedive Ismail's reputation for extravagance, it could have been the business venture to top them all.

Illustrations taken from *Yesterday and Today: The Holy Land, Lithographs and Diaries by David Roberts*, R.A., text by Fabio Bourbon, photographs by Antonio Attini, AUC Press, 1996. LE 190



"Today we ascended to the summit of Sinai, which took us two hours... The view from the top is the most sublime that can be imagined."

David Roberts' Journal, 20, February, 1839

always known, if only from biblical references. By their very nature eye-witness accounts such as those provided by Roberts and, in a different medium by Roberts' contemporary, E.W. Lane (*Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* was written between 1833-1835, i.e. it was completed a year before Roberts embarked for Egypt) promoted themselves on the basis of their veracity. They were bought, in more or less good faith, because they purported to show what other places were really like.

Roberts, though, had a different agenda and his task, as an artist entrepreneur, was to give his readership

## Plain Talk

Critics are unpopular these days but this is hardly anything new. It would seem to be an occupational hazard, for in fact they have always suffered from such unpopularity which comes, in the main, from creative artists. Many creative artists have claimed in writing, like Nicholas Craig in his autobiography *I, an actor* or in interviews, that critics are invariably unsuccessful artists. Certainly one can say, without much fear of contradiction, that there is a general disenchantment between critic and artist. And nowhere has this feeling been made more palpable than in the usually sedate Summer Show at the Royal Academy in London which this year contains a painting by R.B. Kitaj called "The critic kills".

The exhibit is described by Michael Billington in the *Guardian* as "a disturbing, angry work that raises conscience-pricking questions for anyone in the appraisal business". The exhibition celebrates the artist's late wife, Sandra Fisher, who, the artist believes, died as a result of the savage attacks against her husband's exhibition that was organised in 1944.

According to Billington, the reviews were not merely bad, they were devastating and called into question his whole creative purpose and artistic talent. Kitaj's wife had a stroke and died. At that time the artist said in an interview: "They tried to kill me and they got her instead."

The reviews were indeed highly personal. One such review lamented the "toising on us an heroic master, a vain painter puffed with *amour propre*, unworthy of a footnote in the history of figurative art."

Kitaj is not the only person who feels that criticism can kill. Robert Brustein, American director, academic and critic mentions in his *Making Scenes* that in the late 1970's he was running the Yale Repertory Theatre. He was directing *The Seagull* in which his wife Norma was playing the lead. The production was damned by the critic of the *New York Times*. Mrs Brustein continued until the performance run came to end but two days after the final show she died of a heart attack. There was also the case of Mary Ure who in 1975 appeared in *The Exorcism*. As a result of bad reviews of her first night she also died.

How many times have we been confronted in the cinema with that classic scenario — the show opens, the cast give it their all, only to spend the rest of the evening in a state of nail biting suspense until the first editions of the newspapers arrive. Only then do they know whether they can sleep easily.

There is no doubt that the history of the arts is filled with hostilities between critics and artists. There is no doubt that no one, as Billington put it, "wants to be judged" or to be subjected to the stings of waspish critics. But compared to the past, current antagonism is less. Just think of the Ruskin-Whistler law suit in 1877 — which I dealt with in a past article — or the acerbic reviews given earlier this century by that mistress of the one-liner, Dorothy Parker, who once wrote of the performance of a leading actress that she managed to run "the entire gamut of emotions from A to B". Billington poses the question: "Must artist and critic always be forced to stare at each other across the barbed wire?"

He comes up with an interesting theory, which is that commercial art regards the critic as an enemy. A bad review affects the purchase of seats or undermines the number of visitors. Thus critics can stop artists and those involved around them from making money.

There are, however, in the history of modern British and Egyptian art, incidents of healthy dialogue between artist and critic. I still remember the public debate engaged between Kenneth Tynan and Eugenio Fornes in 1958 about the theatre of the absurd. It was a debate that went on for weeks engaging such people as Orson Welles and Philip Toybey. In Egypt there was the famous confrontation between Aqqad and Mazni on the one hand and Ahmed Shawki on the other. It was a debate that turned from personal criticism, of Shawki to a wide ranging discussion of poetry in general.

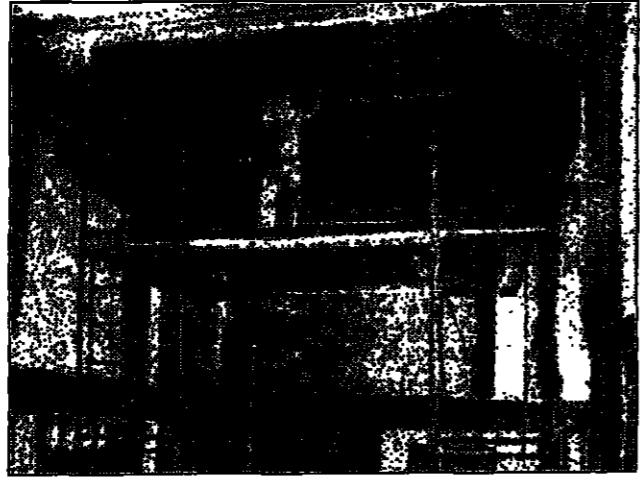
Here in Egypt the problem now is not serious, since very little space is devoted to criticism and very few serious critics exist. But if I may venture an opinion I would say that criticism should not be regarded as the last word about a certain work of art, but as the opening of a public debate. Critics should concentrate on the work itself without indulging in personal abuse.

As Robert Brustein puts it in *Who Needs Theatre?* a critic should be more than a policeman on the lookout for a misdemeanour. He should extend the artists' activities into a realm of meaningful discourse.

**Mursi Saad El-Din**

# Sehem gets makeover

Beit El-Sehem, one of Egypt's most charming medieval homes, is being transformed into a museum. Nevine El-Aref surveys the construction scheme



After succumbing to natural decay and suffering earthquake damage in October 1992, it was high time to restore Beit El-Sehem, the medieval home named after its third owner Sheikh Mohamed Ahmed El-Sehem, a famous merchant of the 18th century.

Restoration began two years back when the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) granted 1,900 million Kuwaiti dinars (over LE10 million) to the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA). This is the first time the AFESD earmarked funds for restoration and it is the beginning — it is hoped — for continued collaboration with the SCA.

As soon as the accord was signed, an in-depth study of the building's history, location, architectural style and interior decor was carried out, a video documentary was produced and 1:10 scale models were made for every room. Studies on the foundation substructure, the infrastructure of the surrounding area and an underground water table are now on the agenda, said Assad Nadim, director-general of the El-Sehem restoration and documentation project.

As it stands, the house has a massive outer door

followed by a smaller doorway designed to preserve both the security and privacy of the household. Various halls, vividly offset by well-kept plants, lead off the rectangular courtyard.

The *salamlik* (men's quarters) of the house has two main reception halls. The larger, known as *qa'at Al-Qur'an* (*Qur'an's hall*) was specifically earmarked for religious ceremonies and gatherings with distinguished visitors. The smaller and more intimate hall was reserved for gatherings with friends and relatives.

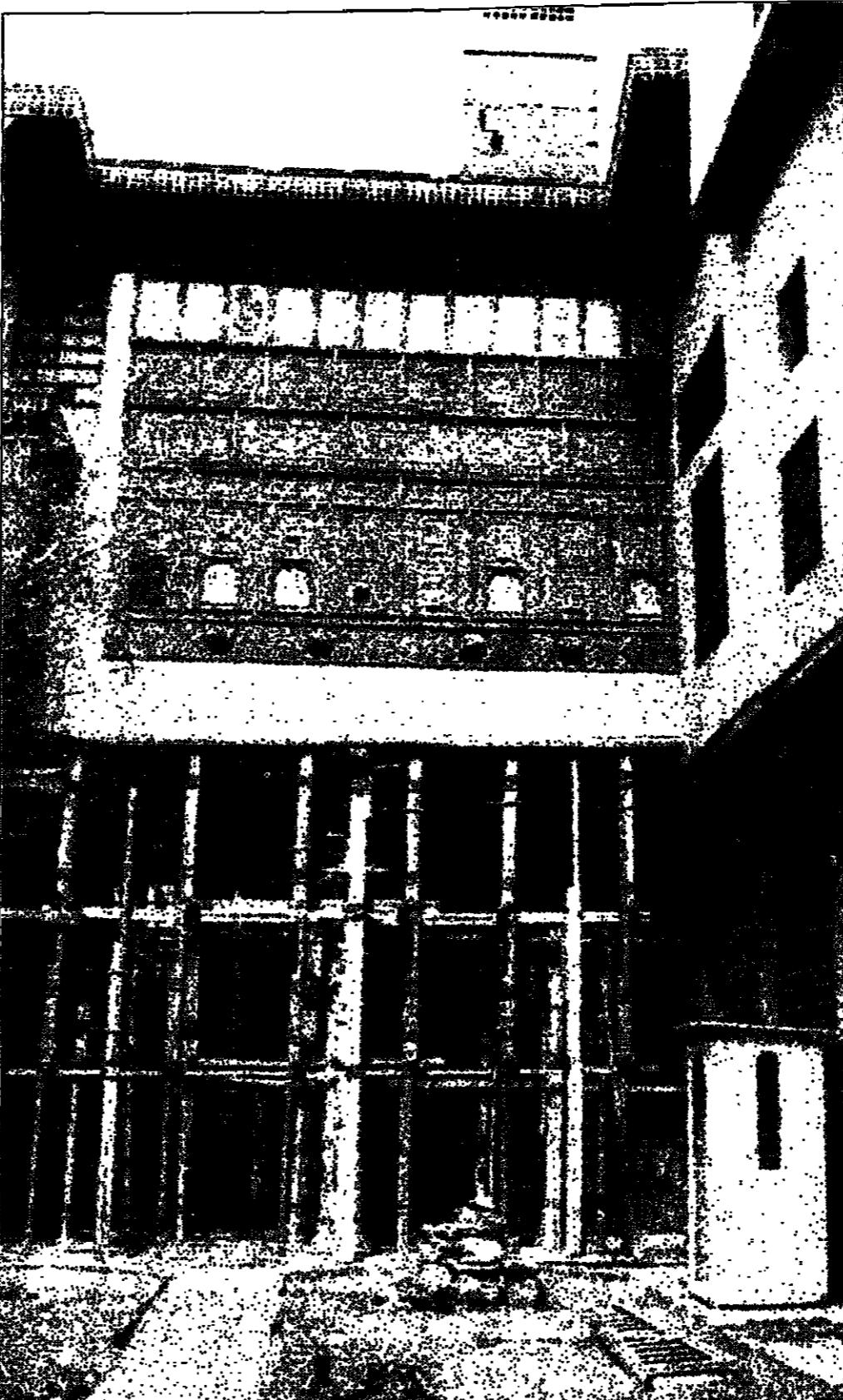
The *haramlik* (women's quarters) has a large number of rooms linked with corridors and a lavishly decorated stairway with oriental objects of great beauty. One of the most interesting rooms is devoted to Turkish pottery. Its walls are decorated with magnificent blue and white ceramic tiles. Other displays include diverse objects, furniture and fittings that were traditional in medieval Cairo.

Actual restoration started in March 1996 in the *Qur'an* hall. One of the house's most unique features — the *shokhshehza* woodwork ceiling — has been removed so that its damaged and deteriorated parts can be replaced.

The house is scheduled to reopen in 1997. The ground floor will be set aside for lecture halls and a permanent computer centre where the house's history will be documented. Visitors will be able to tour the first floor, furnished with new Ottoman-style furniture. All other floors will be restricted to researchers and students.

Beit El-Sehem is located in the Mukski area on a small street called Darb Al-Asfur, about half-way between the mosques of Barquq and Al-Hakim.

The house has a massive outer door



Work in progress at Beit El-Sehem

## How to get there

### Buses

**Cairo-Aswan**  
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 3pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE25 thereafter.

A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

**Cairo-Port Said**  
Services every half hour from 6am to 10pm; 9am, 3pm and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

**Alexandria-Port Said**  
Service 6.45am, from Ramsis Square, Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

**Cairo-Hurghada**  
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm; LE45 thereafter, both each way.

**Alexandria-Hurghada**  
Service 8am, from Ramsis Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

**Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh**  
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

**East Delta Bus Company**  
Services to North Sinai, South Sinai, and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia from Shubra, then Qalati near Ramsis Square, Almaza and Tagnid Square near Heliopolis. Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbasiya Square. Tel. 452-4753.

**Cairo-Sinai**  
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 8pm, from Qalati, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets 6.30am bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

**Cairo-EgyptAir**  
Services every half an hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qalati, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets 6.30am bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

**Cairo-Luxor**  
Tickets LE20 for Egyptians, LE70 for foreigners, both round-trip.

**Cairo-Hurghada**  
LE70 for foreigners, both round-trip.

**Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh**  
Tickets LE20 for Egyptians, LE82 for foreigners, both round-trip.

**Sunny summer deals**

**Cairo-Luxor**  
There are between two and five direct flights daily. Check EgyptAir 300-0999; Opera 380-3444 or Hilton 731-9806.

**Cairo-Aswan**  
Services 8am and 2pm. Tickets LE99 for foreigners, both round-trip.

**Cairo-Port Said**  
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE12.

**Cairo-Alexandria**  
Services 6.45am and 8am. Tickets first class LE3 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.

**Cairo-Aswan**  
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

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# Faizy world champion

Squash junior Ahmed Faizy fulfilled the hopes of his fans, and the expectations of the tournament organisers who had seeded him number one, when he secured the individual junior world championship title last Friday.

Faizy beat Australia's Stewart Boswell, the number three seed, by three games to one (9-6, 3-8, 9-7, 9-6), in a breathtaking match at Cairo Stadium, cheered on by 1,500 spectators in seating designed for no more than 1,000.

At the start of the match Boswell seemed nervous and dropped the first game, but hearing encouragement from the non-Egyptian fans around the court, his performance picked up in the second. Boswell, who was hoping for revenge on Faizy for beating him in the British Junior Open in January, had clearly studied Faizy's long, low strides and shots well. He managed to use a side-wall shot followed by a straight one deep into the back of the court to catch Faizy out a couple of

times. This trick did not always work, however, as Faizy recovered quickly and took more control of the court. By now it was evident that both players were as good as each other; both fought for every shot and both were determined to keep the serve for themselves for as long as they possibly could. In this game, however, Boswell pulled away from his rival to take the game 9-6.

With the score tied at 1-1, Boswell and Faizy went into their third game, which turned out to be an incredible 30-minute clash of wills and skills. The players tied in points three times: 2-2, then 5-3, then a critical 6-6. Whenever one scored a point, the other fought harder to score the next. This tit for tat storyline continued until Faizy managed to edge ahead of Boswell, winning the game 9-7.

By the fourth game tension was running high around the court as Egyptian fans began to sense victory, but knew that the game was not yet won. Feeling the title

slipping through his fingers, Boswell's tension made him determined but not distracted; his shots became stronger and seemed to reflect his frustration. At one stage the players tied at 5-5, but Faizy's concentration deepened and he managed to put Boswell out of the match by a score of 9-6.

"Faizy's physical fitness and experience helped him a great deal, but Boswell is also a very good player," commented junior team coach Ahmed Sufat after the match.

On court, Faizy has gained a reputation as a quiet player, not given to outbursts against umpires or opponents, with a maturity lacking in many senior players. These are all qualities vital to produce professional performances that can be enjoyed by both opponents and spectators. Boswell, too, shows similar qualities which may well enable him to take over the junior crown when Faizy moves to the senior circuit.

Meanwhile, Karim El-Mistikawi, seeded five-eighth, had secured victory of the competition when he beat Malaysia's fourth seeded Ong Beng Hee 3-1, to take third place after Boswell. Hee was another strong contender, who had some clever shots but also seemed to be rather out of breath and unfit. After a 79-minute match, Mistikawi managed to put Hee out by the skin of his teeth; the final scoreline stood at 5-9, 9-3, 10-9, 10-9.

Despite the difference in seedings, coach Ahmed Sufat had expected Mistikawi to win, particularly after he beat England's Lee Beachill, seeded two, 3-2 in the quarterfinals before losing to Boswell in the semifinal.

Egypt's third team-member Amr Shabana also put on a respectable performance, despite being knocked out of the quar-

Ahmed Faizy won the World Individual Junior Squash Championships on home ground at the Cairo Stadium with one of his most spectacular performances, writes Eman Abdel-Moeti



Faizy striving not to loose a shot by Boswell

photo Abdellah El-Sherif

After a day off on Saturday, Egyptian players were again on court on Sunday for the beginning of the team event. Egypt is hopeful of clinching the team trophy for the second time.

## On the sidelines

### IOC warning

THE INTERNATIONAL Olympic Committee (IOC) has warned the Atlanta organisers to improve the transport and computer systems at the Centennial Games or risk humiliation. Emergency meetings of IOC officials, organisers and sponsors were held as transport and technological failures worsened, sparking angry complaints from competitors, the media and the public. Journalists and competitors told horror stories about trying to get to the sporting venues.

### Trapped!

US DREAM Team basketball players say the small hotel rooms and tight security in Atlanta are making them feel more like prisoners trapped in a beautiful prison than the honest Olympic attraction.

### Gold reward

A FILIPINO senator, Ernesto Herrera, has proposed a law giving life-time allowances and other rewards to any Filipino athlete who brings the nation its first Olympic gold medal. As well as a monthly allowance of 5000 pesos (\$192) for life and a collateral-free loan of one million pesos (\$38,500), the athlete would have priority in acquiring government land.

### Baywatch in Atlanta

BAYWATCH star David Hasselhoff cheered for US boxers from a front row seat at the Olympic boxing arena. After being introduced by a ring announcer between fights, Hasselhoff stood and acknowledged the crowd by taking off his cap and yelling "USA...USA".

### Hockey champs defeated

REIGNING champions Germany and Spain were both defeated in the opening games of the Olympic hockey tournament last Saturday. Germany's men lost 0-1 against Spain and Spain's women crashed 0-4 to world champions Australia.

### First gold medal

POLISH marksman Renata Mauer won the first gold medal of the Atlanta Olympics. Mauer overcame a seemingly insurmountable lead by Germany's Petra Horneber to win the women's 10-metre air rifle event on the final shot. She finished with 497.6 points, two tenths of a point ahead of Horneber at the Wolf Creek Shooting Complex. Aleksandra Ivesec of Yugoslavia took the bronze with 497.2.

### New world records

BELGIAN Fredrick Deburghgraeve and South African Penny Heyns have set new world records in the swimming events. Deburghgraeve, who won Belgium's first-ever Olympic swimming title with a tough victory in the men's 100m breaststroke final, broke the old record in the morning heats, swimming in a record time of 1:00:60 (one minute and 0.60 seconds).

Penny Heyns set a new world record of 1 min 07.02sec in the women's 100m breaststroke heats. She went on to win South Africa's first gold medal since 1952 in the final of the same event.

TURKEY'S tiny weight-lifting star Halil Mutlu eclipsed his own world snatch record on his way to winning the flyweight title. The minuscule lifter, only 1.52 metres tall, smiled with bar still aloft as he improved the snatch record in the 54 kg class by 2.5 kg to 162.5 kg on his way to a two-lift aggregate of 287.5 kg. His performance came just six days after his 23rd birthday.

### First Irish gold

MICHELLE Smith presented Ireland with its first Olympic swimming title, dethroning defending champion Krisztina Egerszegi in an enthralling women's 400m individual medley final. Smith, added another gold when she won the 400 metres freestyle race.

### Help from above

RUSSIAN soldier Olga Kuchneva asked for divine inspiration to help her depose compatriot Marina Logvinenko and win the women's 10 metre air pistol gold with an Olympic record score of 490.1 points.

### Diamond gold

MICHAEL Diamond won Australia's first ever Olympic shooting gold medal in the men's trap event and said he hoped reaction to the Port Arthur massacre would not mean the sport was excluded from the 2000 Games in his native Sydney.

### Old gold

JEANNIE Longo, the greatest women's cyclist of all time, crowned her controversial career by finally winning an Olympic gold medal at the age of 37. The Frenchwoman won the women's road racing title in a time of 2 hours, 36 minutes 13 seconds.

### Dedications

AMERICA'S Greco-Roman wrestler, Dennis Hall, who won second place in the bantamweight event, dedicated his silver medal to combating the problem of drunk-driving. His brother was killed in an accident involving a drunk driver. Angel Martino, the swimmer who finished third in the 100-metres freestyle, turned her medal over to Trisha Henry, a 20-year-old cancer victim who works among the volunteers at the Games.

### Russia on top

RUSSIA has maintained the dominance previously held by the Soviet Union in Olympic gymnastics, winning the men's team gold over China and fellow former Soviet Republics Ukraine and Belarus.

compiled from AP and AFP

Edited by Inas Mazhar

## Ali opens Games and hearts

The Centennial Olympic Games was accorded a multi-million dollar welcoming ceremony on Friday. But the show will be remembered for the indomitable spirit of just one man

Presidents, including the US's Bill Clinton who declared the Games open, along with prime ministers, royals and dignitaries from all walks of life witnessed the opening ceremony of the 26th Olympiad, the biggest sporting event ever to be staged on the planet.

A record 10,000 athletes from 197 countries, 27 countries more than were present at the 1992 Games in Barcelona, took part in the ceremony, which was seen by 83,000 people in the Olympic Stadium with millions more watching on television. The nations they represented ranged from the tiny Pacific island of Nauru to the might of the superpower host nation.

Among the new teams taking part were the Palestinians — their black, white, red and green flag held aloft by a member of the team providing a powerful symbol of the aspirations of a people.

And, in what was surely intended as a message to the world, Iran's flag was carried by a woman, the first Iranian woman athlete to take part in the Games since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. In the Barcelona Games in 1992, Iran had caused controversy by refusing to allow the country's name placard to be carried by a woman from the Spanish organising team. This year's flag bearer is competing in the shooting events.

In his opening ceremony speech, Juan Antonio Samaranch, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) president, called on the world to declare an "Olympic truce" during the Games and pledged IOC funds for the reconstruction of sports facilities in Bosnia. "We urge all parties involved in armed conflict to observe the Olympic truce and to lay down their arms so that dialogue may be restored as a prelude to peace," he said.

Earlier, in a blaze of light, colour and music, the 26th Games witnessed a showy spectacular of entertainment in which 5,500 people performed. Gladys Knight (minus the Pips) sang "Georgia on my Mind", opera diva Jessye Norman performed and the words of Atlanta's most distinguished son, Martin Luther King, rang out across the stadium. The show was said to have cost 35 million dollars.

But, for all the dollars and glamour and glitz, the ceremony belonged to just one man. When boxing legend and 1960 Olympic gold medallist Muhammad Ali, his body trembling and debilitated from Parkinson's Disease — incapacitated but not subdued — took the Olympic torch for the final walk towards where the flame would be lit, whose heart did not miss a beat out of awe and respect for this great athlete, fighter and man?

## A week of disappointment

Things are looking grim for Egyptian athletes in Atlanta, with attendant dismay for officials, fans and journalists, reports Essam Abdel-Moneim from Atlanta

We were not really expecting instant glory and gold medals. But after two years of serious preparations and millions of pounds spent on training the 29 selected athletes, we were expecting something. And so far, nothing has been delivered.

Here in Atlanta, we had high hopes for Egypt's daughter, 18-year-old swimmer Rania Elwany. The whole delegation went along to the Georgia Tech Aquatic Center to support the African and Arab champion in both the 100 and 200 metres races.

But despite the claims of sports officials in Cairo that Elwany was a contender for a medal, the swimmer, who trains in the USA under the supervision of an American coach while studying at the University of Alabama, not only failed to qualify for the B class race — the playoffs for 9th to 16th place, but failed to equal her own Egyptian records. She came 19th in the 100 metres; in the 200 metres, she was 24th out of 48. Teammate Tamer Zehouni failed in the 100 metres freestyle and came in last. Both swimmers have still to compete in the 50 metres freestyle today, and tomorrow.

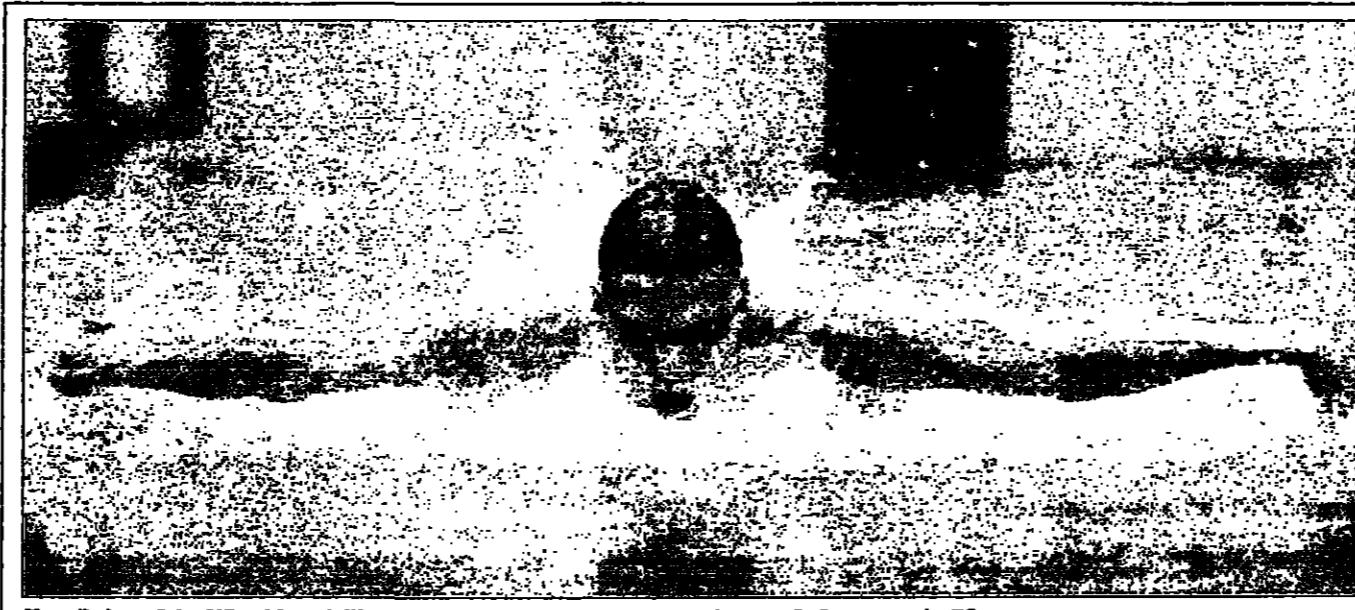
The second disappointment of the first day was the elimination of judo champions Heba Rashid in the women's over 72kg, and Basil El-Gharabawi in the men's over 95kg category. All of Rashid's 150 kilograms were not enough to get her beyond the quarterfinals, having won one match, she was defeated in two. El-Gharabawi, meanwhile, was eliminated in the first round.

The wrestlers and boxers, all eliminated from the first rounds, also said an early goodbye to the Games. There are still some Egyptian athletes left to compete in shooting and weight-lifting, but officials are not optimistic about their chances.

Egypt's remaining hopes are the handball team, and rower Ali Ibrahim, who managed to reach the semifinals of the skiff event, held yesterday.

The handball team started competition yesterday, playing its first match against Algeria in group B, which also includes teams from Brazil, France, Germany, and Spain. Morale on the team, which is ranked sixth in the world, is running high. They know they carry the weight of national hopes and expectations on their shoulders, especially following the other athletes' disappointing performances, but they seem strong enough to bear their burden, and remain cheerful and positive.

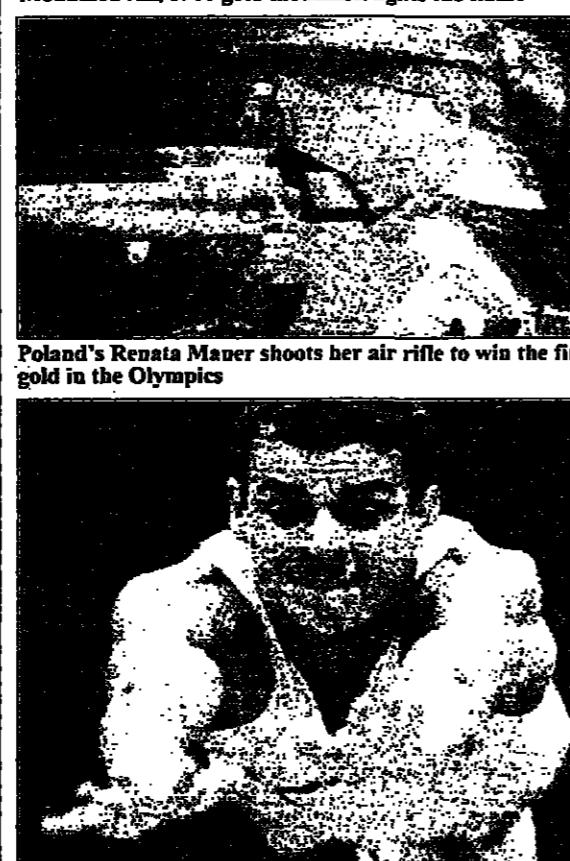
Away from the Egyptian delegation's woes, the Games themselves are running into operational problems. Complaints have been flooding in — from athletes, visitors, journalists and officials — over transport problems within the city, and the computer processing of results and other data. In short, the first two days have been chaos. A hassled Bob Brennan, press chief of the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games, told reporters, with perhaps a little desperation in his voice, that "things should get better".



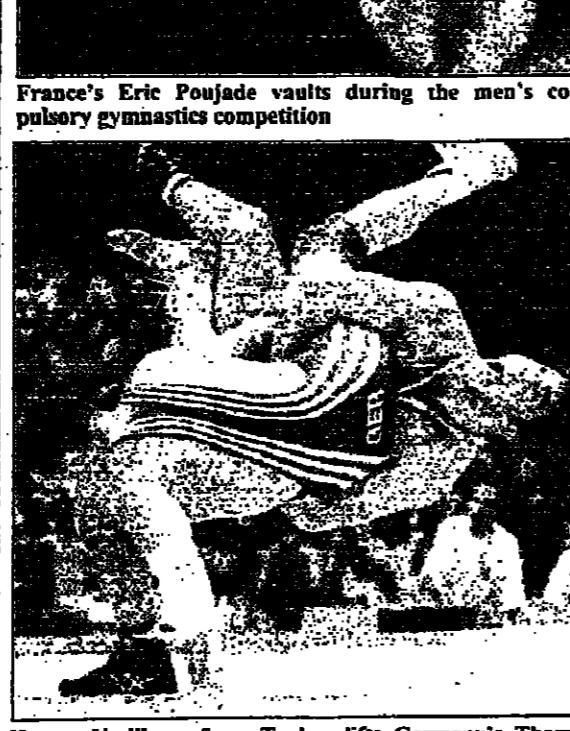
Tom Dolan of the US gold medallist of the 400m individual medley (photos: AP, Reuters and AFP)



Mohamed Ali, 1960 gold medallist, lights the flame



Poland's Renata Mauer shoots her air rifle to win the first gold in the Olympics



France's Eric Poujade vaults during the men's compulsory gymnastics competition



Australia's Ruth Moriz performs on the balance beam of the women's team compulsory gymnastics

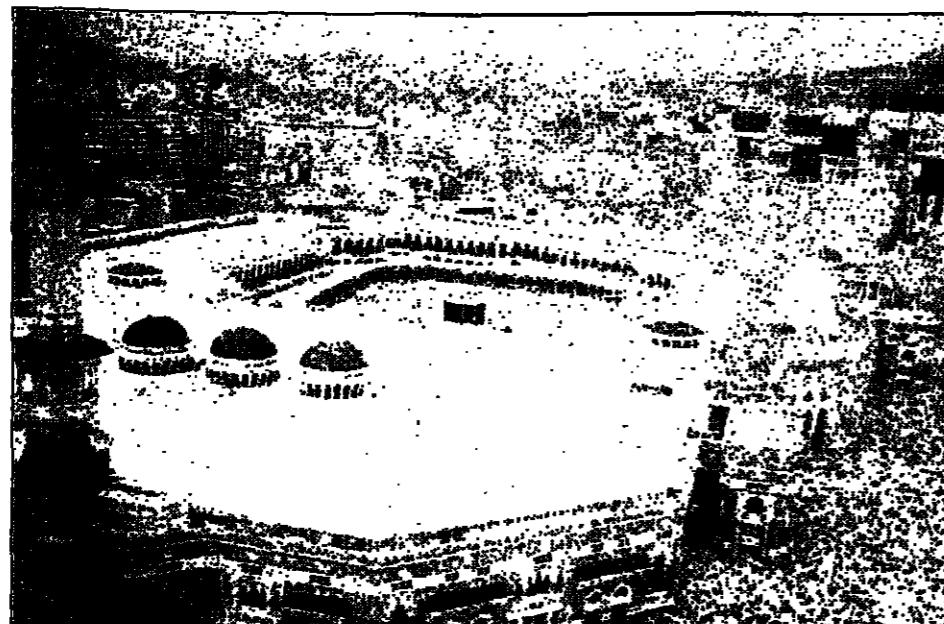


photo: Sami Salloum

visit

secret

## Kamal Ismail: Making monuments

For sixty years he has worked behind the scenes. He built the Mugamma, the imposing symbol of Egyptian bureaucracy standing in the heart of Cairo. Now he has turned his mind to Mecca, and Medina

He is in his office before ten. There is little on the premises to show that sixty years have passed since he first started work here, in 1936.

The classical furniture, the walls and the old oak desk reveal none of the tell-tale signs of time. Apparently renovation is recent. For a man of 89, or even for a man 20 years younger, he is intellectually keen and physically upright. He goes to the office every morning, despite the downtown traffic. Following an established routine is important.

He receives an overseas call about a project he is currently working on. He is very careful about what he says. Serious, but never too stern, with the suggestion of a smile in his eyes — their softness perhaps, the one revelation of age.

He is currently supervising the final touches on the monumental project he was commissioned to plan and execute, as engineering consultant, 13 years ago by the Saudi government: renovating and extending the sanctuaries of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina and the Ka'ba and Mosque of Mecca. The project in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina entailed extending the existing prayer area to 95,000 covered square metres, and adding 250,000 square metres of prayer areas. Under this have been constructed a parking lot with room for 5,000 cars as well as sanitary facilities.

In Mecca, the area around the Ka'ba was extended by 19,000 square metres, comprising three storeys and open spaces, and an open yard about 75,000 square metres in area was created. Underground parking spaces and tents have also been built.

In the Prophet's sanctuary, Ismail, cooperating with a specialised German company, made innovative use of computer-designed, hydraulically

controlled umbrellas and sliding domes to protect worshippers from the sun and retain heat in the Mosque during winter.

He considers this his most important project, his life work. But Ismail has left his imprint on landmark works over the past sixty years, from the grand architectural sweeps of the 1930s and '40s to the industrial complexes of the '60s. A meticulous administrator who thrives on teamwork, he is always involved in the minutiae of planning and execution.

Kamal Ismail was born in Mit Ghazir, Daqahliya, in 1908. His father, the *umda* or village head, wanted him to study medicine; but Ismail was "smitten by architecture, even as a very little boy. I'd walk past a building and envy its architect, and imagine how he must feel, seeing his building go up, like a father watching his son grow."

He entered the Architecture Department of the Royal School of Engineering (*Madrasat Al-Hadara Al-Malikiyya*), graduating in 1927. He travelled to France, and studied at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts, a school which gave America and Europe its major architects. He obtained his doctorate in architectural sciences in 1934.

He started his career at the Maslahat Al-Mabani Al-Amiriya, the administration responsible for all government buildings, considered Egypt's major architectural school in the 1930s and 1940s, and became its director in 1949. In 1953, only three years after he had been appointed director-general, the Maslahah was closed down — "the demise of one of Egypt's great architectural schools. It undertook landmark works, like the Egyptian University, Parliament, the Mixed Courts (now the High Court) buildings and the telephone company. The master

architects, like Ali Hassan and Mustafa Fahmi, executed these works. There was a department in every province responsible for repairs and renovation.

If a window was broken, it would be repaired the next day. The principle of maintenance is very important; there must always be a budget set aside for maintenance." The rigour with which he was trained seems a thing of the past, however, and — understandably perhaps — he is somewhat *ancien régime* in his disapproval of today's standards of execution. His reservations regarding the education of architects today are subtly expressed, but strong nonetheless.

In the mid-'40s Ismail was commissioned by Osman Pasha Mubarak, then Minister of Works, to create Alexandria University's Faculty of Architecture, the now famous building facing Kotsika by the sea.

Muharram was a great architect and a man with vision and courage. He did not care if he was criticised. He spoke to me of a building in ancient style, to fit modern usage, and I felt that Alexandria was the best place to apply the idea, because it was an open city, receptive to new ideas." The building, with its grandiose columns, was inspired by the lines of Pharaonic architecture.

The monumental lines familiar to Ismail were used again in 1951, but adapted to the Mugamma complex which dominates Cairo's Tahrir Square.

After 1953, the Maslahah now a thing of the past, Ismail had to adapt to new circumstances. He was no longer building grandiose buildings, but he began work as a consultant for works undertaken by the Mabarek Mohamed Ali (Mohamed Ali Hospital) Welfare Society.

He was commissioned by the government to build large-scale industrial projects: chemical and mil-

itary plants, as well as the famous Abu Qir industrial complex, which entailed overall industrial planning, with housing, a hospital and a railway station.

He is, one feels, the counterpart to the Hassan Fahthi of *Architecture for the Poor*. Equally concerned with aesthetics and the use of culturally harmonious lines, his taste runs more to the relatively massive qualities of the Pharaonic and Greek temple than to domes, arches and stucco work. He entertains strong views — expressed as early as 1954 — on the "problems of abnormal population growth in Egypt".

There has been no dearth of recognition, yet he feels his message has remained unfulfilled. "I never missed an opportunity, during the past fifty years, to try to design works in line with inherited styles — whether Pharaonic or Arabic — yet in harmony with the spirit of the times. The aim is to give character to architecture. But people went on building blocks and putting openings in them for windows. In Cairo for instance, unlike many major cities, there is no collective architectural personality. It is as though every architect was referring to a different magazine."

About two years ago, Ismail sent a letter to *Al-Ahram*. One is reminded, reading it, of his comment regarding the architect's progeny: pride, and a touch of indignation at others' failure to recognise beauty.

"Wooden kiosks had been built as an extension on top of the Mugamma building, and I commented on how this distorted what is a very important facade for the (Tahrir) square. The building had been whitewashed, although it is made of artificial stone, and so it lost its features. They later removed the whitewash, but not the ugly kiosks."

He does not stop at regrets, though. He almost skims over the past, more concerned with balancing

out his activities and summoning his energy for the work at hand.

In the evenings, at home, it is important for him to keep in touch, not to become intellectually isolated. "I watch television. The news is important, it keeps one in contact with the present."

He reads "books not related to architecture, as much as possible. It is important to change one's state of mind."

But his work requires constant perusal of developments in architecture, and sometimes science and the environment. "The first lesson we learned in architecture is that it is a mixture of science and art, not simply the cosmetic aspect of a building. One must be like a surgeon, to know all the materials used over the past centuries, and how to adapt them to circumstances, things we live with, like earthquakes, traffic, the need for sanitation, air conditioning, proper acoustics..."

He spends most of his afternoons at home, limiting his social life to a weekly luncheon and the occasional Friday gathering at the club.

He is probably unable, by now, to relinquish the discipline which has directed him practically all of his life, but he is aware of change — "let us not say old age... but of advanced age, of rules not so strictly kept as when one was younger".

But he goes on. With his work in Mecca and Medina done, he has completed the most important project of his life, in which aesthetics and science, ancient architecture and modern technology, were married.

He says it is his last project, but he cannot countenance life without his work. He will, no doubt, soon embark on a new endeavour.

Profile by Aziza Sami

## Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

# مهرجان الصيانتة المجانية

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Goodbye and farewell to my good friend, the *Weekly's* No.1 fan and head of the EC delegation in Egypt, Michael McGeever. Press Attaché of the Delegation of the European Union. Maha Kabil held a farewell cocktail party for him at the EC delegation's office in Zamalek last week to give all his friends, including the *Weekly's* editor-in-chief Hosny Guindly, managing editor Hani Shukrallah, myself and colleague Gamal Nkrumah, as well as *Al-Ahram* colleagues Aya Ezz and Maher El-Dahabi a chance to tell him just how much we'll miss him and to wish him all the best — as well as indulge in good food and drink and socialise the afternoon away, of course.

When I heard that my good friend, head of the Women Writers Association, Latifa El-Zayyat, had recently been granted the State Merit Award, I knew that this was one opportunity her friends were not going to let go unnoticed. And sure enough, a few days ago, I received an invitation from the members of the association, which the late Amina El-Said once headed, to a celebration tea at the Cairo Library in Zamalek, where I was joined by Latifa's colleagues and friends, writers and journalists, including prominent columnist, author, and library director Kamel Zobeiri.

The One Thousand and One Nights ballroom at the Nile Hilton last week saw one thousand and one stars lighting up a very special wedding. At the centre of attention were the son and daughter of life-long friends of mine: Abeer, daughter of Hussain El-Sha'ir, assistant to the editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram* and Gamal Abdelfattah, appeals lawyer, and Hisham, son of plastic artist and artistic consultant for

*Al-Ahram* Mounir Kana'an, and the wonderful Samaa' El-Biesi, editor-in-chief of the much acclaimed *Nisf El-Dunya* magazine. And starry, starry night that it was, it was only fitting that the guest list consisted of celestial bodies galore. To mention them all would require an entire supplement but with one already included in this week's issue, suffice it to say that the ballroom literally

vorous turnout, the party was such a success that the stars did what they did best, and shone on until the early hours of the morning.

Whenever I need to make an overseas phone call — and being a woman who has friends all over the world, I often do — there is only one place I ever think of making it from. I have always loved the

efficiency and friendliness of the staff at the Almaza telephone exchange, and so it came as no surprise at all when I heard that vice-president of the Telephone and Telecommunications Organisation, Abdelfattah Abu Seiri, had recently awarded the Almaza branch for being having the cleanest and nicest looking building. The manager and employees were all given cash awards, and my good friend, general manager of the Almaza, Kobra and Sheraton districts, Mahmoud Metwally, was given a special award for being the best and most helpful area manager.

I was dining in the Cairo Sheraton's La Mamma restaurant the other day when I heard music that sounded quite familiar. Now the only other time I had heard music like that was when I was in Italy last year, and so for a while I was rather confused. Only for a while, of course, because after asking around I discovered a

trio, consisting of a singer, violinist and guitarist, had been flown over from Napoli by the hotel to give the restaurant's guests a real taste of Italy. Personally, I would have thought the food was supposed to do that, but the idea obviously worked, and for the rest of my meal it really did feel that I was back in Rome — if only for a short, sweet time.



sparked with the presence of journalists, media representatives, ministers, authors and artists — a veritable cocktail of names and faces. What a merry time we had. Definitely made all the merrier, of course, with the fabulous performances by singers Mohamed Tharwat and Mostafa Amar, and everybody's favourite dancer, Fifi Abdou. With such a mar-

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